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UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE AS ESSENTIAL EVALUATOR COMPETENCIES

BY

GABRIELA LISETH GARCIA

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Jennifer Greene, Chair
Professor Lizanne DeStefano, Georgia Institute of Technology
Professor Thomas Schwandt
Professor Laurie Stevahn, Seattle University

ABSTRACT

"What constitutes a competent evaluator?" This question has been a topic of discussion and lively debates within evaluation communities around the world. In the past two decades, numerous evaluation organizations, associations and societies have moved towards developing and using evaluator competency frameworks. Given that multiple frameworks have been developed worldwide, 12 thus far, we are now at a point where it is no longer a question of can evaluator competencies be identified, but how do we move forward with revising, understanding, and using these frameworks not only in practice, but also in the education and training of evaluation. As King and Stevahn (2015) recently noted, "…regardless of who developed [these competency frameworks] or how, it is unlikely that anyone would disagree that they could benefit from additional developmental work" (p. 31). As such, this study aimed to inform and advance this conversation on evaluator competence. In particular, the aim of this study was to examine the meaning of two dimensions of practice, interpersonal competence (IC) and situational awareness (SA), from the perspective of experienced program evaluators. A qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009) utilizing semi-structured interviews was best suited for this study. Based on the responses of 13 interviewed evaluators, five main findings emerged. First, evaluators pointed to three critical aspects of SA which included intentionally learning about a project, attending to the cultural dimensions of an evaluation, and understanding stakeholder perspectives on and expectations for evaluation. Second, evaluators identified two important aspects of IC, including purposefully engaging in ongoing communication with the project being evaluated and mindfully framing and sharing evaluative information. Data analysis also revealed two factors that informed how evaluators discussed these aspects of IC and SA. These factors include evaluators' 1) professional dispositions and 2) reputation and experiential knowledge. These factors were important to understand because evaluators discussed IC and SA

through their professional lenses that were based, in part, on their dispositions and experiences. In closing, implications for evaluation education and training and future research are discussed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary program evaluation emerged from the practice of applying social science methodology to the specialized study of social programs (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991; Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005; Wilcox, 2012). The continuous funding, time, support, and resources invested in social and educational programs have nurtured the practice of program evaluation and, after a half of a century, it continues to develop and expand not only in the U.S., but also worldwide (King & Podems, 2014; Podems, Goldman, & Jacob, 2014). This is evident in the significant growth in regional, national, and international evaluation associations and societies around the world (Donaldson & Lipsey, 2006; Rugh & Segone, 2013). Evaluators are in high demand, as more and more funders are requesting their social and educational programs be evaluated for accountability purposes (Christie & Azzam, 2005). The significance of the field is further apparent by a declaration by EvalPartners—a global and collaborative partnership launched in 2012 that includes over 45 international organizations—that 2015 would be the International Year of Evaluation. The aim of this declaration was not only to celebrate the practice, but to also advocate for evaluation as an important element for both civil society and policy making (http://mymande.org/, 2015). Hence, contemporary program evaluation continues to develop as a respected and sought-after practice.

As the field continues to grow, so do discussions and debates about what it means to be a competent evaluator. Presently, anyone can claim to be an evaluator since, with a few exceptions, there are "no standard evaluation competencies to be met through training or practice, nor certifying or credentialing processes that give a seal of approval to would-be evaluators" (Imas, 2010, p. 1; Stevahn, et al., 2005; Worthen, 1994, 1999). Many within the

evaluation community have raised concerns about the quality of work produced by those who lack proper training and experience in conducting evaluations (Stevahn, et al., 2005; Worthen, 1994, 1999). However, a notable challenge to reaching a consensus on what it means to be a competent evaluator is the fact that the field is diverse and "means different things to different people" (Altschuld, 1999; King, 2003, p. 58; Rowe, 2014; Shadish et al., 1991; Smith, 1999). Vastly differing perspectives on the competencies necessary for evaluation practice remain, and "let the buyer beware" continues to be a watchword for those who seek and use services from an evaluation specialist (King & Podems, 2014; Smith, 1999; Stevahn, et al., 2005; Worthen, 1994, p. 9; 1999).

What is Competence?

The use of the terms competence and competency are not new as they are part of our everyday language. Typically, these terms signify an individual's ability to do something well or up to standards. However, a review of the competence literature revealed that there is no one way to define these terms as few agree on what they mean (Parry, 1996). Furthermore, the rationale for using competence often determines the definition given to the term (Hoffmann, 1999). In other words, competence is purpose- and context-dependent (Tigelaar & Van der Vleuten, 2014). Not only have the terms competence and competency been analyzed from different perspectives, such as psychology, human resources, and business management (Camelo & Angerami, 2013; Hoffman, 1999), they also often substitute for each other and are used interchangeably with other terms such as "abilities," "skills," "personality traits," and "excellence" (Mulder, 2014; Weinert, 2001; Parry, 1996). As such, a cloud of confusion surrounds the conceptualization of competence in general, and evaluation competence in particular, as "there is no basis for a theoretically grounded definition or classification from the seemingly endless inventory of the ways the term

competence is used" (Weinert, 2001, p. 46). A closer examination of competence is provided in Chapter Two.

Regardless of this ambiguity, developing competencies has generally been found to be helpful for: 1) creating a shared and common language about work qualifications (McLagan, 1997); 2) clarifying role responsibilities and expectations; 3) guiding recruitment, hiring, and training of employees; and 4) serving as a tool for job performance assessment (Wilcox, 2012; Stevahn et al., 2005). It is no surprise that as the field of program evaluation evolves, greater attention has been given to the development of evaluator competencies (Kaesbauer, 2012; King & Stevahn, 2015). However, as faced by other professions (e.g., medicine, social work, teaching), capturing the complex practice of evaluation as measurable competencies has proven to be a challenge, especially when it comes to the attitudes and dispositions posited to be essential for good evaluation practice (Rowe, 2014).

Competence Movement in Program Evaluation

While there are no agreed-upon competencies within the greater evaluation community, the concept of competence has been and continues to be recognized as fundamental to the production of credible, high-quality evaluations and essential for the professional advancement of the practice (Stevahn, et al., 2005; Torrie, Dalgety, Peace, Roorda, & Bailey, 2015). For example, evaluator competence is highlighted by the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators (2004), which state that evaluators must "provide competent performance to stakeholders." However, the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal traits necessary to provide this competent performance are not discussed or referenced.

Evaluator competencies have been discussed by various scholars throughout the evaluation literature (Kirkhart, 1981; Mertens, 1994; Patton, 1990; Scriven, 1996). In the past

two decades, several evaluation organizations, associations and societies worldwide have moved towards developing and using frameworks that outline essential competencies for evaluation practitioners (Imas, 2010). One of these early initiatives includes the work by a group of researchers in the United States, independent from any evaluation association, who systematically identified evaluator competencies in 2001 and later revised this product into the taxonomy of Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (ECPE; Stevahn et al., 2005). The work by this group has nationally and internationally influenced the conversation and research on evaluator competencies. For example, the ECPE taxonomy (2005) has been used in competency-related research that has explored how evaluators acquire competencies necessary to practice evaluation (for further review see Dewey, Montrosse, Schröter, Sullins & Mattox, 2008; Dillman, 2012). In addition to this research, the ECPE taxonomy was used as a starting point by the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) in the development of their competency framework.

Around the world, several countries (e.g., Russia, South Africa) and evaluation associations (e.g., the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association [ANZEA], International Development Evaluation Association [IDEAS], German Evaluation Society [DeGEval]) have followed suit and developed their own version of competency frameworks. To date, I was able to find 12 evaluator competency frameworks that have been developed (Garcia, 2015). While frameworks vary in how they are written and organized, I found that the majority of frameworks address—albeit differently—five overarching categories (King & Stevahn, 2015):

1. Professional: ability to act ethically/reflectively and enhance/advance professional practice
2. Technical: ability to apply the appropriate methodology
3. Situational: ability to consider/analyze the context successfully

4. Management: ability to conduct/manage projects skillfully, and
5. Interpersonal: ability to interact/communicate effectively and respectfully

These categories were offered by King and Stevahn (2015) based on their review of three frameworks that have been initially validated: the ECPE, the competencies developed by the Canadian Evaluation Society (2010), and the taxonomy developed by the International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction (ibstpi, 2006). I found these categories to be useful in broadly understanding the 12 frameworks, which I reviewed for an American Evaluation Association conference presentation (Garcia, 2015). Additionally, several of these frameworks aim to be useful and applicable in: 1) supporting professional designation, 2) informing professional development, 3) encouraging self-assessment, 4) informing evaluation staff selection, and/or 5) on a broader scale, contributing to the professionalization of the field.

To understand this competency movement, it is helpful to situate the emergence of these frameworks within "two specific interconnected contexts, one professional, and the other political" (United Kingdom Evaluation Society, 2012, p. 3). In the professional context, efforts have been and continue to be made to define not only what it means to conduct evaluations, but what it means to conduct high-quality evaluations. Various standards, guidelines, and principles have been developed by associations and societies that represent ideal ways evaluations should be executed. The most recognized of these efforts are those made by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE) that initially crafted the Program Evaluation Standards in 1981 and revised them in 1994 and 2011 (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). While these efforts have significantly helped built an evaluation culture and advanced the professionalization of the field, the overarching principles set forth do not specify what an evaluator needs in terms of practical skills and knowledge or personal attitudes to function as an

effective evaluator; hence, there remains a push towards identifying and understanding evaluator competencies (King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001; Simons, 2012; Stevahn et al., 2005; Wilcox & King, 2014).

The other aspect of this context is political, and this has to do with the often dominance "of one of the major purposes of evaluation—accountability" (UKES, 2012, p.3). With the development of the field, users of evaluation, such as clients and commissioners, have become more aware and knowledgeable about the power of evaluation, especially when it comes to the potential of influencing policy decision making. Because few formal qualification processes exist (the Canadian Evaluation Society's Credentialed Evaluator Professional Designation Program is the notable exception), the availability of competency frameworks "appear[s] to offer a useful, further check on the quality of evaluation and on those who conduct it" (UKES, 2012, p. 3). The professional and political contexts have cultivated the current competency movement within the evaluation field.

As King and Stevahn (2015) note, "regardless of who developed [these competency frameworks] or how, it is unlikely that anyone would disagree that they could benefit from additional developmental work" (p. 31).

Statement of the Problem

As program evaluation has evolved into a practice that often operates in complex, socio-political contexts (Abma & Widdershoven, 2008; Greene, 2001), technical skills are not sufficient for effectively and meaningfully contributing to evaluation use, program improvement, and social change (King & Stevahn, 2013). Program evaluation demands skillful communications and interactions with various stakeholders at each phase of the evaluation—negotiating the evaluation with client(s), communicating with program participants for and

during data collection, discussing and presenting evaluation findings to client(s) and relevant stakeholders, and so on (King & Stevahn, 2013). In particular, an evaluator's ability to effectively communicate and build relationships, referred to as interpersonal competence (IC) in this study, underlies and influences all aspects of an evaluation (King & Stevahn, 2013). Interacting with others is further informed by the surrounding culture and context as "evaluations are highly situational, grounded in specific times and places" (King & Stevahn, 2013, p. 71). An evaluator's ability to also appropriately assess the surrounding situation and context of an evaluation, referred to as situational awareness (SA) in this study, is equally important. IC and SA are recognized as fundamental to conducting high-quality evaluation practice. Furthermore, these two dimensions of practice have been included—albeit conceptualized somewhat differently—by the developers of various frameworks. However, these two dimensions of practice have proven to be a challenge to operationalize as measurable evaluator competencies (Rowe, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to inform and advance the current conversation on evaluator competence. More specifically, the goal was to examine the meaning of interpersonal competence and situational awareness from the perspective of practicing and experienced program evaluators. The research question guiding this study was: How and in what ways do experienced program evaluators describe aspects of interpersonal competence and situational awareness in their accounts of evaluation studies they have conducted?

Significance of the Study

First, the significance of this study is grounded in the need to further understand evaluator competence, especially as the value of evaluator competencies continues to be a topic

of conversation (King & Stevahn, 2015). Furthermore, this study is situated in the need to better understand the intangible aspects of evaluation practice such as those related to communicating effectively, building relationships with clients and relevant stakeholders, and attending/ responding to the surrounding situation of an evaluation. While Tourmen (2009) and Fitzpatrick (2004) are examples of scholars who have conducted research on similar topics, additional information is warranted to further inform our understanding of evaluator competence from different perspectives and lived experiences. Second, this study aimed to add empirical insight into two of the overarching categories of developed competency frameworks: interpersonal competence and situational awareness. The majority of existing competency frameworks have been primarily derived from literature reviews, surveys of association members, expert panels, and existing standards and guidelines. Expert knowledge from "on the ground" evaluation practice is needed to further inform the utility and value of the frameworks. As Rowe (2014) noted, what we need is to "learn from practice what a competent evaluator looks like and, importantly, how we can recognize and develop attitudes and dispositions essential to being a good contributor to evaluation" (p. 123). As such, this study aimed to learn from the practice of experienced program evaluators. Third, this study provided empirical evidence that could be used to develop case studies and role-play scenarios for the training of new and emerging evaluators. Fourth, this study contributes to empirical research on evaluation (Christie, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2004; Tourmen, 2009; Wilcox, 2012) and responds to Cousins and Earl's (1999) suggestion that "we need to add to the empirical knowledge base through carefully developed and executed studies that have the potential to extend our theories and guide our practices" (p. 316). Last but not least, this study also aims to contribute to the call to further strengthen and clarify evaluation's professional identity through research on evaluator competence.

Limitations of the Study

This study was not without limitations. First, I did not collect supplementary data such as evaluation plans or reports from interviewees. While this information may have provided additional contextual insight into the evaluation studies discussed through the interviews, this was not the main focus of this study. Instead, this study focused on the "behind the scenes" processes that related to how evaluators go about communicating, interacting and building their situational and contextual knowledge. Often times, these processes and decisions are not recorded or presented in formal documentation. For example, in an evaluation report, an evaluator might share what was learned about the contextual circumstances of an evaluation but not the steps he or she took to build that knowledge. As another example, a communication plan might be agreed upon at the beginning of an evaluation, but the specifics surrounding the interactions and communications through the life of an evaluation are often not explicitly documented. Second, the information collected depended on what the interviewee was willing to share and was further limited to his or her lived experiences. However, employing member checking throughout the interview (i.e., real-time confirmation of information provided), asking questions that aimed to explore the actual practice of evaluators, and conducting the interview in a non-judgmental manner that conveyed respect and appreciation (Patton, 1990) helped support a level of confidence and trust in this study's findings. Third, the number of participants included in this study could be viewed as a limitation because results are not generalizable. However, the aim of this study was not to claim generalizability of findings but to provide insight into the interpersonal and situational aspects of evaluation practice through the perspectives and experiences of selected program evaluators.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I review the literature on competence to gain a better understanding of how this concept is defined and practically operationalized. In particular, I discuss the origins of competence, two conceptualizations of competency, professional competence, and generic versus domain-specific competencies. In the second section, I explore competence within the field of program evaluation as well as what we know as a field about the interpersonal and situational dynamics of evaluation. In the third section, I address how two evaluator concerns—namely, interpersonal competence and situational awareness—are conceptualized across evaluator competency frameworks.

Section One: Review of the Competence Literature

The commitment to identifying evaluator competencies has accelerated in the past two decades. This is evident by the numerous evaluator competency taxonomies and frameworks that have been developed and endorsed by evaluation societies, governments, and organizations tasked with evaluation responsibilities. While these admirable and time-consuming efforts have been taking place worldwide, "the field of evaluator competencies is in its relative infancy" as fundamental questions remain regarding the value of evaluator competencies (King & Stevahn, 2015, p. 31). Can a list of competencies accurately capture the broad set of skills required in a field that has flourished as a diverse and social practice that operates in complex and multi-level contexts? Particularly, can a list of competencies capture what is essential for good evaluation practice—including the attitudes and dispositions of an evaluator? (Rowe, 2014). With these questions in mind, the purpose of the first section of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of the concept of competence—how it is defined and practically operationalized. More

specifically, the aim is to explore the ways in which intangible aspects of occupations are conceptualized as competencies.

Competence and Competency at a Glance

There is no doubt that understanding what makes professionals competent at their jobs is important as competence represents the state of being qualified to perform in a specified job position or context (Mulder, 2014). In other words, the notion of competence refers to being able to do something well. While competence is often used interchangeably with the term competency in the literature (Flynn, 2014; Jamil, 2015; Wilcox, 2012), there is a fundamental difference between these two terms (Russ-Eft, Bober, de la Teja, Foxon, & Koszalka, 2008). Competency, or its plural form competencies, represents a practical concept that often defines specific criteria, such as knowledge, a skill, a disposition, or an attitude, that contributes to effective performance in a specified job position (Russ-Eft et al., 2008; Wilcox, 2012). Competence is more of an abstract and broad term that encompasses the "totality" of competencies identified—the "knowledge, skills, attributes, behaviors, and attitudes demanded in a particular undertaking and the ability to orchestrate these in addressing the problems one faces" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 125).

However, as the study and use of competence has expanded, various contributors have influenced its conceptual and practical development (Hoffmann, 1999; Jamil 2015). For instance, psychologists have emphasized the importance of individual traits within competence and its connection to effective performance; management theorists have focused on the achievement of organizational goals through improving worker performance (Hoffmann, 1999); human resource researchers have used competence as a strategic tool for guiding organizational management efforts (Hoffmann, 1999; Jamil, 2015); and educators have perceived the concept "as a political move to vocationalize education" (Jamil, 2015, p. 46). As this briefly demonstrates, researchers

and practitioners "have evolved several meanings that serve as a focus for *their* [emphasis added] efforts to implement the competency approach to their work" (Hoffmann, 1999, A Definition of Competency, para. 1). Few agree on what competence means, and there is no one standard way of defining and applying the concept (Flynn, 2014; Hoffmann 1999; Hsieh, Lin, & Lee, 2012; Jamil, 2015; Parry, 1996). Often times, the rationale for using competence informs and determines how it is defined, which has resulted in a confusing concept with multiple meanings (Hoffmann, 1999; Jamil, 2015).

Two Origin Perspectives to Competence

The conceptualization, research, and practice of competence was primarily influenced by efforts that took place in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK; see Horton, 2000 and Jamil, 2015 for additional information on the origins of the competency movement). From these efforts, two perspectives to understanding competence emerged: the input (US technique) and output (UK technique) approaches (Hoffmann, 1999; Horton, 2000; Jamil, 2015).

The input approach emerged as a response to the declining competitiveness of the US economy in the 1970s (Horton, 2000). The initial emphasis was to understand the basis for excellence in the employment context (Horton, 2000). This approach originated from a psychological perspective and focused on understanding superior performance through the identification of underlying individual attributes and characteristics as competencies. McClelland (1973), a psychologist, was one of the first to propose the notion of competence as an alternative to traditional aptitude and intelligent testing, which at that time was used to predict job or life success. He argued that competence, as opposed to intelligence, could be used as a measure to predict superior job and life performance and that personality traits and characteristics, such as values and interpersonal skills, played a key role in explaining an individual's success in a

specified situation or job position (McClelland, 1973; Jamil, 2015). This approach is viewed as more complex than the output approach because it incorporates underlying attributes, talents, and abilities—the competencies—that an individual brings to a situation (Hoffmann, 1999; Horton, 2000). Learning and training is emphasized within this approach because the focus is on creating learning content that covers the characteristics of outstanding employees who have been observed to exemplify superior performance.

The output approach focuses on the outcomes, tasks, and functions of a specified job position (Horton, 2000; Hoffmann, 1999; Jamil, 2015). These outcomes (i.e., sales, profits), referred to as competencies within this perspective, are clearly defined as the focus is on what an individual can do. Thus, competence is verified through the accomplishment of observable tasks that define a specified job position, which are often identified through a functional job analysis. In terms of instruction and training from this approach, the emphasis is on the product and not the content of the learning process. Additionally, there are two sub-approaches to the output approach identified within the literature. The first focuses on an individual's outcome performance that is observable and measurable. The aim here is to assess the observable outcomes—the competencies—against established standards and use that assessment to evaluate whether an individual is competent or not. The second highlights the quality of the outcome performance and incorporates high and/or minimal level of acceptable performance (Hoffmann, 1999).

The input and output approaches define the role of competence differently. On the one hand, competence depends on observable aspects of a specified job (output) while on the other hand, competence depends on aspects that an individual brings to a job (input). In other words, these two perspectives exemplify that there is a difference between "aspects of the job at which a

person is competent, and aspects of the person which enable them to be competent" (Woodruffe, 1993 as cited in Hoffmann, 1999, Response (Performance), para. 1). As outlined in Table 1 below, distinct questions and purposes guide these two approaches: what needs to be done versus what contributes to effective performance (Hoffmann, 1999).

Table 1

Output and Input Guiding Questions

Output	Input
1. What needs to be done?	1. Who are the most competent performers?
2. How well does it need to be done?	2. What underlying attributes do they have that make them better than others at what they do?

Performance is an aspect, albeit differently, of both approaches (Hoffmann, 1999). The input approach emphasizes what competencies contribute to superior performance while the output approach generally focuses on competencies that are observable and measurable through performance in a specified position or situation. However, the input approach has been noted to be "in conflict with a good deal of the literature on the topic because it ignores the observable nature of the individual's performance" as it focuses on individual underlying characteristics and not directly on the assessment of performance (Hoffmann, 1999, Individual (Underlying Attributes), para. 2). The output approach, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that competencies and effective performance are direct and testable relationships. This has also been found to be problematic because it ignores that certain occupational performance, such as that of managers, involves intangible aspects and fails to recognize "that there are various ways" to learn and become competent (Jamil, 2015, p. 46).

Context also matters in both of these approaches to competence. For example, the output approach might be more appropriate for tangible jobs that have clear, bounded job activities

(Jamil, 2015). For more complex jobs, identifying outcomes could be much more difficult. As Hoffmann (1999) notes:

> The requirements expected of a machine operator, or a brick-layer are more easily defined in terms of specific performances and standards of output than say, a marketing department manager. Where jobs are more complex, the task of describing outputs is much more difficult. This is due to the wider range of outputs deemed appropriate to demonstrate competent performance, the complexity of some of the tasks, and the uncertain relationship between knowing how to do the job and actually doing it well. The job of marketing department manager may require a set of underlying knowledge and skills rather than a set of proscribed behaviors. Apart from the content of knowledge and skills of marketing, a range of abilities as a manager of people is needed for competent performance. (Definition of Competency, para. 7)

Conceptualizations of Competency

The notion of competence is appealing because, even without getting into the specifics of what the term means, it signifies the ability to perform up to standards or to do something well. The application of the term has been broad and applied in various fields, occupations, and professions (Wilcox, 2012). For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) Project used the concept of competence as a frame of reference that addressed one's ability to think, act, and learn (Rychen, 2001; Wilcox, 2012). In defining the specific features of competence, the DeSeCo project defined a competency as:

> More than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating. (OECD, 2005, p. 4)

With this understanding, the DeSeCo Project proposed three categories of key competencies that individuals need in order to "adapt to a world characterized by change, complexity, and interdependence" (OECD, 2005, p. 7; Wilcox, 2012). Here, competencies are used to illustrate what individuals need to lead a successful life and contribute to a well-functioning society

(OECD, 2005). This is just one example of the multiple meanings and applications ascribed to the term competency. As a result, there is a sense of "confusion about the true nature of the term and its use" (Hoffmann, 1999, Individual (Underlying Attributes), para. 3).

Focusing on the practical concept of competency, the components of this term often include knowledge, skills/abilities, attitudes/dispositions, and/or personality traits/characteristics (Marrelli, Tondora, & Hoge, 2005). First, knowledge refers to what an individual knows or needs to learn (King & Stevahn, 2015). It can be factual information, a level of awareness, or an understanding about facts, rules, or processes that are necessary to perform specific tasks or in specific situations (Marrelli et al., 2005; Wilcox, 2012). It can be acquired through formal education, job training, and/or work experience (Marrelli et al., 2005; Wilcox, 2012). This level of knowledge can also be explained as explicit knowledge because it primarily answers the question of "What does an individual know?" which can be answered using systematic language (Bassellier, Reich, & Benbasat, 2001). Second, skills/abilities refer to what an individual can do based on what he or she knows. Skills tend to be specific to a situation and are not possessed in isolation as skills relate to an individual's tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge answers the question of "What can an individual do?" When it comes to competency, both explicit and tacit knowledge are important and interconnected components. For example, "Being able to explain the rules in the game of chess does not make one a chess champion. One needs to be able to apply these rules to be competent" (Bassellier, Reich, & Benbasat, 2001, p. 164). Third, attitudes/dispositions (such as optimism) refer to what an individual might think or feel about something (King & Stevahn, 2015). Consequently, attitudes/dispositions are much more complex than knowledge and skills because they reflect an individual's inherent mindset towards certain situations. Last but not least, personality traits/characteristics, such as being cooperative,

creative, flexible, and humble, are personality qualities generally formed in early life and, similar to attitudes/dispositions, can be resistant to change (Parry, 1996).

It is important to note that these components are not synonyms for competency, but are dimensions that underlie competency (Hsieh et al., 2012). For example, an individual may know how to do a task (explicit knowledge) but may not be able to complete or demonstrate it proficiently (Hsieh et al., 2012). However, due to the ambiguity of the term competency, it is often used interchangeably with skill, knowledge, or personality trait (Parry, 1996; Russ-Eft et al., 2008; Wilcox, 2012). Those placed in charge of developing competencies, the plural form for competency, may run the risk of creating a laundry list of competencies comprised of skills and personality traits which may not be very useful for training or educational purposes (Parry, 1996). This risk is particularly high with complex occupations or professions that require workers to accomplish an array of "outcomes." As numerous scholars and practitioners have attempted to define the term competency, there appear to be two general ways of approaching the construction of this term: 1) a competency is knowledge, a skill, and/or an attitude organized around an underlying construct of "intent" (Boyatzis, 2008) or 2) a competency is a cluster of knowledge, a skill, and/or an attitude.

Competency: Underlying characteristics and superior performance. While McClelland (1973) was one of the first to use the term competency in relation to job and life performance, the term became widely known within the human resource management field through the work of Boyatzis, who is credited as one of the first to formally define the term (Hoffmann, 1999). Building on McClelland's (1973) work, Boyatzis (1982) advanced research on the understanding of competency as an underlying personality characteristic that enables an individual to deliver

superior performance, which reflects the focus of the input approach previously discussed (Jamil, 2015; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

An iceberg model is often used within this conceptualization of competency to demonstrate the different levels or types of competencies (see Figure 1). First, skills and knowledge are surface competencies because these are more easily observed and easier to develop and train (Hsieh et al., 2012; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Self-concept (i.e., an individual's self-image), traits, and motives are underlying competencies that significantly influence and direct surface competencies (Hay Group, 2003). These underlying or "hidden" competencies, especially motives, are much more difficult to observe as these are closer to an individual's core personality (Hsieh et al., 2012; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). As such, it is suggested that such competencies be considered in the selection and recruitment of employees and not so much in educational/training efforts as these "deeply rooted competencies" can be much more difficult to change (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 3).

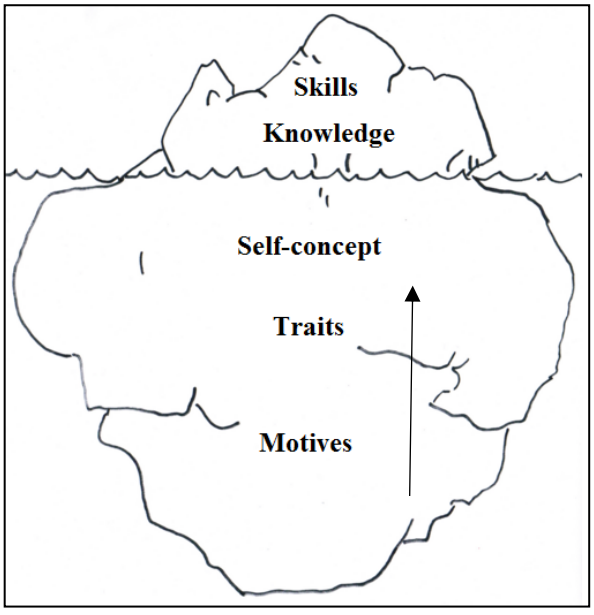

Figure 1. Iceberg Model of Competencies

Additionally, an underlying construct of "intent" is what further defines this understanding of competency (Boyatzis, 2011; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Wilcox, 2012). Intent, which is driven by personality characteristics, such as motives, directs behaviors (i.e., skills) that are manifested and observable. Thus, "for behavior to be a true competency, it needs to be associated with intent—the intentional use of behavior in delivering a performance outcome" (Hay Group, 2003, p. 4). Let's take an example of asking questions and listening to someone—these are different behaviors where the intent can vary. One intention could be "to better understand the person" (Boyatzis, 2008). The intent needs to be clear in developing competencies and "only the applied knowledge, manifestation of skills that produce success, and observable behaviors related to attitudes are necessary and sufficient conditions to competencies. For example, in a business setting, 'to understand market pricing dynamics' is knowledge, while 'to use understanding of market pricing dynamics to develop pricing models' is a competency" (Wilcox, 2012, p. 20).

The Hay Group (2003), a global management consulting firm, emphasizes that "hidden" competencies such as traits and motives become more critical and influential as the complexity of the job increases. Additionally, because the aim is to understand and identify underlying characteristics that contribute to superior performance, competencies are not likely to change "because the underlying motivational aspects of the jobs and job holders remain constant. However, the way in which the behaviors reflect the underlying drivers may change" (Hay Group, 2003, p. 9).

Overall, the application of this understanding of competency has been largely advanced by and within the human resources and management field (Horton, 2000). Competence in this context is closely linked to helping organizations gain a competitive edge (Hsieh et al., 2012). As

an example, Boyatzis (2008) discussed the theory of performance as a basis for the concept of competency (p. 6). Within this theory, "maximum performance is believed to occur when the person's capability or talent is consistent with the needs of the job demands and the organizational environment" as demonstrated in Figure 2 (Boyatzis, 2008, p. 6). Effective performance is contingent on the "best fit" between an individual's competencies, the demands of the job, and surrounding organizational environment.

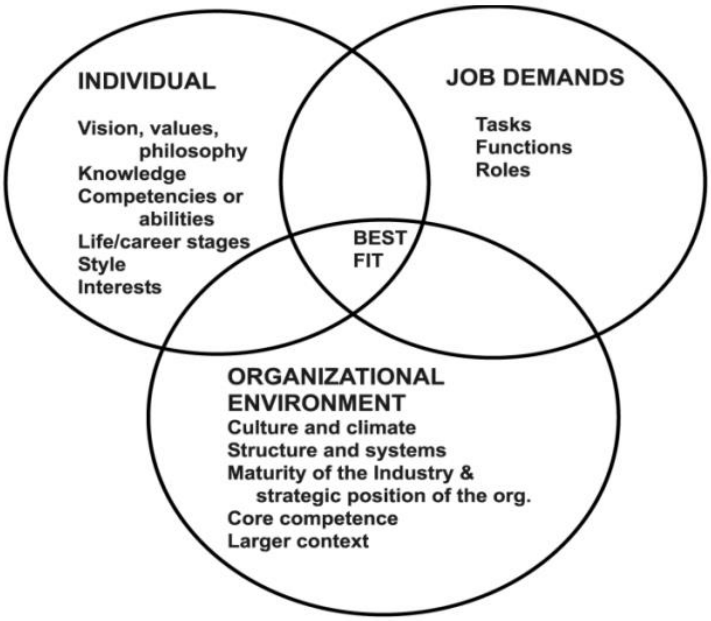

Figure 2. Theory of Action and Job Performance: Maximum performance, stimulation, and commitment is the area of maximum overlap or integration (Boyatzis, 2011).

Competency: A cluster of related knowledge, skills, & attitudes. Parry (1996) offered a different way of understanding a competency. A competency is a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills that affects a major aspect of an individual's job, correlates with performance on the job, can be measured against established standards, and can be improved through training (Parry, 1996, p. 60). Time management is an example of a competency that meets this definition. Often, the focus is on teaching time management as a skill by addressing topics such as how to

delegate and prioritize tasks or how to professionally say "no" (Parry, 1996). Through this effort, the knowledge and attitudes dimensions of time management are neglected. In terms of knowledge, "if employees realize that they are costing the organization at least twice their salary (factoring in benefits and overhead), they are more likely to look for ways to invest their time wisely" (Parry, 1996, p. 62). Attitudes such as "I can't say no to my boss or the client" or "It's quicker if I just get it done as opposed to giving this task to someone else" can negatively influence effective time management.[1] Listening and problem-solving are additional examples of competencies (Parry, 1996).

Professional Competence

Professional competence is another conceptualization that has also received attention and has been notably advanced within the medical education context (Tigelaar & Van der Vleuten, 2014). Epstein and Hundert (2002) are often recognized for their definition of professional competence as "the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served" (p. 226). In other words, this refers to a professional's ability to not only integrate domain-specific knowledge and skills within his or her decision making, but also tolerate and manage ambiguous situations faced and strategically respond and make decisions with limited information (Camelo & Angerami, 2013; Tigelaar & Van der Vleuten, 2014). This conceptualization of professional competence is similar to the input approach described earlier because while knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important, the emphasis is on an individual's emotions, self-reflection, and internal processes. Professional competence depends on "habits of mind that allow [a] practitioner to be attentive, [critically

[1] Another example of this understanding of competency is the definition provided and used by the DeSeCo project discussed previously on page 6.

curious,] self-aware, and willing to recognize and correct errors" (Epstein & Hundert, 2002, p. 228) For example, a competent physician is someone who is aware of the ways in which his or her level of anxiety influences his or her clinical judgment (Epstein & Hundert, 2002, p. 228). This is particularly relevant among people in professions dedicated to the greater society, such as those in social work, medicine, and teaching.

The importance of context is also highlighted within the conceptualization of professional competence (Mulder, 2014). Competence can be further understood as the relationship between an individual's ability, a task, and the surrounding context in which the task is embedded. Taking Epstein and Hundert's (2002) example:

> Our view is that competence is defined by the interaction of the task (the concrete process of diagnosing and treating Mrs. Brown, a 52-year-old business executive who is now in the emergency department because of new-onset chest pain), the clinician's abilities (elicit information, forming a therapeutic relationship, performing diagnostic maneuvers, and making judgments about treatment), and the health system (good insurance and ready access to care). Caring for Mrs. Brown requires different skills than caring for Ms. Hall, a 52-year-old uninsured homeless woman who has similar symptoms and receives episodic care at an inner-city clinic. (p. 228)

As this example demonstrates, the required skills and knowledge shift according to the professional situation faced. What is of utmost importance in professional competence is also the ability to be situationally aware and respond to a situation with the appropriate set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Generic and Domain-Specific Competencies

Several authors have also acknowledged that context plays a role in developing and differentiating between domain-specific and generic competencies (Adelman, 2014; Jeffrey & Brunton, 2010; Mulder, 2014). Context matters within domain-specific competencies because it refers to abilities relevant in a particular occupation (Jeffrey & Brunton, 2010), such as the specific knowledge a cardiologist draws from in treating heart disease. Competencies, such as

communication, decision making, interpersonal skills, and problem solving are examples of generic competencies that are context-free, initially abstract, and developmental in nature (Adelman, 2014; Mulder, 2014). Because generic competencies can cut across occupational and professional boundaries, without further specification and clarity, it would be difficult to assess these competencies within a particular job position.

In summary, there is no one way to define competence or competency. This is evident by the two different competence origins as well as the two different approaches to conceptualizing a competency. Professional competence is another conceptualization of competence that emphasizes the ability of a professional to navigate ambiguous situations and appropriately respond and adapt with a proper set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Overall, the rationale for using the term competence has been found to often guide how the term is defined. Hoffmann (1999) argued that various meanings of competence will remain, and "the problem is therefore not to agree on a single meaning, but to select the meaning that best suits the needs of the context and the purpose for which the approach is employed" (p. 5).

Section Two: The Competence Movement in Program Evaluation

The discussion on evaluator competence is not new, as it has been discussed by various evaluation scholars (Kirkhart, 1981; Mertens, 1994; Patton, 1990; Scriven, 1996) and it is also recognized as fundamental to conducting good, sound evaluations (Torrie et al., 2015). For example, the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators (2004) highlight evaluator competence as one of the five principles that evaluators should strive to maintain and improve. The Competence principle states that evaluators should "practice within the limits of their professional training and competence, and should decline to conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits" (Principle B.4). However, what

competence means in terms of the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes evaluators need to "practice within the limits of their professional training and competence" is not defined or provided. As a response, a group of U.S. researchers took on the challenge of developing and identifying program evaluator competencies, which was one of the initial efforts in the evaluation competency movement.

Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (ECPE)

The work on evaluator competencies began as an activity in Jean King's 1-credit colloquium where graduate students were asked to think about evaluator competencies (King et al., 2001). A number of students in the course whose backgrounds were in education and teaching were dumbfounded to discover that there were no established evaluator competencies (Laurie Stevahn, personal communication, May 19, 2014). Although there were general conversations on evaluator skills and abilities within the literature, these lists were not empirically grounded. As a result, Jean King, Laurie Stevahn, Gail Ghere, and Jane Minnema took on the challenge and systematically developed an initial taxonomy that became the Essential Evaluator Competencies. Its development involved reviewing the literature on evaluator competencies, the 1994 edition of The Evaluation Program Standards, and the 1995 version of the AEA Guiding Principles for Evaluators. It also was reviewed by two evaluation experts. Finally, an exploration study was conducted that aimed to establish the face validity of the Essential Evaluator Competencies through the use of a Multi-Attribute Consensus Reaching (MACR) process, "a variation of the Multi-Attribute Consensus Building (MACB) process designed to facilitate group decision making, to engage participants in discussing competences" (King et al., 2001, p. 232). The study sample consisted of 31 practicing evaluators – 28 women and 3 men – from the Minnesota-St. Paul metropolitan area. Following this study, the list was

revised into the current taxonomy of Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (ECPE) and further validated by conducting a cross-comparison study against the 1994 Evaluation Program Standards, 1995 AEA Guiding Principles, and 1995 Essential Skills series endorsed by the Canadian Evaluation Association (Stevahn et al., 2005).

The ECPE is organized into six categories: 1) professional practice, 2) systematic inquiry, 3) situational analysis, 4) project management, 5) reflective practice, and 6) interpersonal competence. Professional practice refers to competencies that deal with the fundamental norms and values of evaluation, such as being able to apply and attend to evaluation standards, approaches to evaluation, and ethical guidelines. Systematic inquiry refers to the technical competencies of evaluation, such as being knowledgeable of data collection methods and being able to conduct data analysis and reporting. Situational analysis consists of competencies that deal with being able to attend to the unique context that surrounds an evaluation. Project management refers to the ability to manage an evaluation, such as the budgeting and supervision and training of those involved in conducting an evaluation. Reflective practice refers to the competencies relevant to an evaluator being aware of him/herself as an evaluator and being able to identify professional development needs to enhance practice. The interpersonal competence category refers to competencies that deal with being able to communicate, negotiate, resolve conflict, and demonstrate cultural competence. In total, 61 competencies were identified across these six categories.

The work by Stevahn and colleagues has not gone unnoticed, because it has nationally and internationally influenced the conversation and research on evaluator competencies. For example, Dewey and colleagues (2008) utilized some of the ECPE categories to investigate the competencies evaluators acquired during graduate school compared to the competencies required

by evaluation employers. Wilcox (2012) further validated the ECPE through the use of a web-based survey and individual interviews in her doctoral dissertation. Dillman (2012) explored how the educational experiences of coursework, mentorship, fieldwork, and participation in professional activities contributed to the development of the competencies outlined in the taxonomy among new and graduate student evaluators. Rogers, Hillaker, Hass, and Peters (2012) utilized the ECPE as a starting point in better understanding the competencies of Extension professionals. In addition to being used in research endeavors, the ECPE also has been used in developing competencies for the Canadian Evaluation Society (Buchanan & Kuji-Shikatani, 2014) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS; Fletcher, Persman, Bertrand, & Rugg, 2014).

Development of Evaluator Competency Framework in Other Countries

Since the development of the ECPE, evaluator competence has garnered a substantial amount of attention within the evaluation community. In fact, various countries, evaluation associations, and organizations tasked with evaluation responsibilities have developed and endorsed core sets of competencies that are meant to be relevant and applicable within their own context. The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation (2014) published a special issue that provided an overview of some of these international efforts. This overview was presented in the form of case narratives that documented the experiences of individuals who were involved in discussing, developing, or establishing competencies in their context. Political, social, cultural, and organization factors were considered and explored through the case narratives. In the interest of time and length of this chapter, I will only discuss the efforts taken in Canada; Aotearoa, New Zealand; and South Africa. The review of these three cases serve as examples of some of the initial journeys taken in developing evaluator competencies. These are not meant to be

representative of all experiences of those involved in developing competency frameworks and only serve as examples of the journeys taken in this competency movement.

Evaluator competencies: Canada. The Canadian evaluation context is an example of how the development and endorsement of evaluator competencies were an essential step to 1) establishing a strong evaluation foundation and 2) furthering the professionalization of the field. In this case, evaluator competencies were developed as part of a credentialing system.

Because part of the mission of the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) is to contribute to the professionalization of the field, the society moved forward with developing one of the first evaluator credentialing systems in 2007. This was done as a response to issues plaguing the evaluation community, such as the production of evaluations that varied in quality, a lack of regulating entry into the field, and concerns regarding evaluation credibility. Furthermore, "evaluators questioned their professional identity and spoke of a desire to better define the nature of their work and examine means of recognizing the skills and knowledge required to do that work" (Buchanan & Kuji-Shikatani, 2014, p. 32). Thus, the CES Credentialed Evaluator (CE) designation, which was launched in 2010, was designed to support the professionalization of the field by defining and promoting the practice of competent and high-quality evaluation practice in Canada ("Canadian Evaluation Society" website, 2014). More specifically, the designation was grounded on 1) the Program Evaluation Standards (2011), 2) the CES Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice (CCEP), and 3) a code of the ethics.

Although the CCEP are grounded on the ECPE (Stevahn et al., 2005), a crosswalk was also conducted as part of the process of developing evaluator competencies suitable for the Canadian evaluation community. Not only did the crosswalk help to further validate the work by Stevahn and colleagues (2005), but it also provided additional details for several of the

competencies. Overall, the following five competency areas with a total of 49 competencies were identified as part of the CCEP: 1) reflective practice, 2) technical practice, 3) situational practice, 4) management practice, and 5) interpersonal practice. Notice that these domains are similar to the ECPE categories, which demonstrates that there is some level of general agreement on the skills and knowledge viewed as fundamental for the practice of good evaluation.

As mentioned, the competencies are a significant component of the CE designation. For example, "Applicants are required to have graduate-level education and two years of evaluation experience, and demonstrate their education and/or experience related to 70% of the competencies in each domain through the application submission" (Buchanan & Kuji-Shikatani, 2014, p. 39). The development of the competency framework is not meant to be prescriptive, but meant to inform and emphasize the diversity of skills and knowledge an evaluator may bring to each evaluation context. In addition to being part of the foundation for the CE designation, the competencies are also used in evaluation training and education, self-assessment, and by evaluation employers in crafting job descriptions.

The development and use of the CCEP continues to be a topic of debate within the Canadian evaluation community. In general, topics of debate revolve around the potential of being overly uniformed in competencies, being inflexible with entry into the field, inefficiently providing training in competency development, and overshadowing the diversity of the field. In light of these raised concerns, CES took a step closer to helping define and clarify the professional identity of evaluators, which is a significant contribution.

Evaluator competencies: Aotearoa, New Zealand. The Aotearoa, New Zealand (NZ) experience provides an example of how aspects of culture and history significantly influenced and guided the development of evaluator competencies. More specifically, aspects of values and

culture were placed at the center of the evaluator competency framework developed by the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA), which is unique compared to other global evaluator competency framework efforts (Wehipeihana, Bailey, Davidson, & McKegg, 2014).

The development of evaluator competencies was part of a larger evaluation practice framework. The practice of evaluation in this context is fundamentally built on Aotearoa NZ Treaty of Waitangi. For NZ evaluators, this means: 1) embracing the Treaty principles of partnership, protection, and participation in Aotearoa NZ evaluation practice; 2) knowing and understanding the historical Treaty relationship between Maori and non-Maori people; 3) ensuring the participation and inclusion of indigenous perspectives and worldviews; and 4) purposefully including and attending to the various Aotearoa, NZ people and cultures (Wehipeihana, Bailey, Davidson, & McKegg, 2014). In terms of the larger practice framework, the Quality of Evaluation Practice Strategy was meant to support quality evaluation practice in Aotearoa, NZ. However this strategy, which includes ethical guidelines and the Program Evaluation Standards (2011), was missing evaluator competencies. The need to develop evaluator competencies relevant to this context emerged shortly after the ANZEA was established in 2006, where members desired further guidance on conducting and ensuring high-quality evaluation. In response, the following efforts were taken to develop a set of competencies: 1) an expert group of 23 experienced evaluators from the Aotearoa, NZ evaluation community was convened; 2) discussions with international visiting evaluators were held; 3) a literature review on evaluator competencies was conducted; 4) an initial draft was developed and presented to ANZEA members and the wider NZ evaluation community for feedback; and 5) the list was revised and the ANZEA competency framework was released in 2011.

The framework contains four domains: 1) contextual analysis and engagement; 2) systematic evaluative inquiry; 3) evaluation project management and professional practice; and 4) reflective practice and professional development. At the center of this framework are the aspects of values and cultural competency due to ANZEA's: 1) understanding that values are an integral part of evaluation; 2) commitment to recognizing and honoring all the cultures that reside in Aotearoa (NZ); and 3) acknowledgement of culture being present in all evaluation contexts. Similar to the Canadian experience, tensions, skepticism and questions emerged throughout the NZ evaluation community regarding the competency framework. However, ANZEA made it explicitly clear that the competencies should be tailored according to the local context and that evaluators are not expected to have all of the competencies listed. Also, ANZEA does not credential evaluators as does CES.

Evaluator competencies: South Africa. The South African experience is an example of how the historical and political background of the country significantly influenced the development of monitoring and evaluation. More specifically, it is an example of how the evaluator competencies were developed for government.

Although the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) was established in 2005, its active inclusion in the development of competencies was minimal to none. Instead, the government-initiated Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) was specifically tasked with developing evaluator competencies. Large government involvement is due to the fact that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in government emerged as a result of donors warranting transparency and accountability for funding provided. Initially, the focus was on monitoring rather than on evaluating programs for purposes of improvement and assessing impact. However, with the development of the National Evaluation Policy Framework

(NEPF), a shift from compliance and monitoring to one that emphasizes improvement and learning took place. New M&E officers were appointed in a short amount of time who had no formal training or experience in the area (Podems, Goldman, & Jacob, 2014). The DPME was then tasked with developing guidelines for a national evaluation system and evaluation standards and competencies that would guide training courses on monitoring and evaluation. In 2012, the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (CLEAR AA) was commissioned by the DPME to help with the development of evaluator competencies and evaluation standards. Steps taken to develop the first versions of the competencies were to: 1) conduct a literature review; 2) hold a group discussion with scholars who had experience with evaluator competencies; and 3) hold a group discussion with South African evaluation academics and practitioners.

The Evaluation Competency Framework (ECF) was crafted and released in 2013 by the DPME. The ECF outlines four major dimensions of competence: 1) overarching considerations; 2) leadership; 3) evaluation craft; and 4) implementation of evaluations. These dimensions are further broken down into domains that contain competencies. Finally, the framework further details what the competencies mean for evaluators, for those who manage and use evaluation results (program managers), and for those who advise on the evaluation process (M&E advisors). The ECF is currently being used by government to inform job descriptions, in selecting and screening evaluators, and in monitoring consulting from evaluation organizations.

Around the world, countries, evaluation associations, and organizations tasked with evaluation responsibilities have followed and endorsed sets of evaluator competencies to help guide evaluation practice in their context. The reviewed cases of Canada; Aotearoa, NZ; and South Africa are just a few of these examples. Additionally, the development of evaluator

competencies has been primarily localized efforts. For instance, Table 2 provides a list of 12 evaluator competency frameworks I was able to identify:

Table 2

List of 12 Evaluator Competency Frameworks

Evaluator Competency Framework	Developed by:	Year
1. Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators	U.S.—group of researchers	2005
2. Evaluator Competencies and Performance Standards	International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction® (ibstpi®)	2006
3. Recommendations on Education and Training in Evaluation: Requirement Profiles for Evaluators	German Evaluation Society (DeGEval)	2008
4. Core Competencies for Evaluators of the UN System	United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)	2008
5. Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice	Canadian Evaluation Society (CES)	2010
6. Evaluator Competencies	Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA)	2011
7. The EES Evaluation Capabilities Framework	European Evaluation Society (EES)	2011
8. Competencies for Development Evaluation Evaluators, Managers, and Commissioners	International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS)	2012
9. UKES Evaluation Capabilities Framework	UK Evaluation Society (UKES)	2012
10. Evaluation Competency Framework (ECF)	Republic of South Africa Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation	2012
11. Evaluation Department Technical Competency Framework	Department for International Development (DFID)	2013
12. Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework	Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) INC.	2013

One of the biggest concerns that has plagued the conversation on evaluator competencies has been the fear of reducing and overshadowing the diversity of the field. Evaluation is consistently evolving and expanding in terms of those involved and the methods and approaches

used in practice. For example, program evaluators: 1) are often trained in diverse disciplines such as in education or public health; 2) fulfill various roles such as that of internal or external evaluator; 3) work in diverse contexts such as nationally, internationally, business, or government; and 4) employ various approaches and methods in evaluation. A list would potentially only capture certain competencies at one point in time and if this "competency list is not updated as the evaluation field grows, it will quickly become outdated and potentially stunt an evaluator's and the profession's growth" (Podems, 2014, p. 134). Additionally, there are concerns that a list would be applied rigidly by evaluation employers, resulting in the inability to be flexible about the various skills and knowledge evaluators bring to the practice. There is also fear that it will be used to strictly regulate entry into the field, limiting the unique diversity of the field. While these concerns continue to be part of the evaluator competencies conversation, the need for evaluator competencies is evident as the field continues to explore and work towards its professional status.

Given that multiple evaluator competency frameworks have been developed, we are now at a point where it is no longer a question of can evaluator competencies be identified—because they have been—but rather, how do we move forward with further developing, understanding and using such frameworks within evaluation education and training and practice (King & Stevahn, 2015)? As King and Stevahn (2015) note, the development of these frameworks "could benefit from additional developmental work" as "the field of evaluator competencies is in its relative infancy" (p. 31). Thus, there is much research to be done in this area. For that reason, the purpose of this study was to contribute to and advance our understanding of two of the domains often addressed within evaluator competency frameworks: interpersonal competence (IC) and situational awareness (SA).

Interpersonal and Situational Dynamics within Program Evaluation

Interpersonal skills matter within the practice of contemporary program evaluation. All evaluations, regardless of purpose and design, require some level of communication and social interaction with people—clients, program participants, evaluation partners, evaluation team members, and among others (King & Stevahn, 2013). However, the interpersonal dimension of evaluation practice has often received scant attention within the literature as some have argued that evaluation is about methods and that social relations "are not part of evaluation; they only make up the 'environment' of evaluation" (Abma, 2006, p. 188). However, in the past decade, evaluation scholars, such as Tineka Abma and colleagues Jean King and Laurie Stevahn have explicitly explored and advocated for the importance of social relations within evaluation.

Abma (2006) notes that evaluation is a social practice, and evaluators have "relational responsibilities" that should not and cannot be overlooked (Abma & Widdershoven, 2008, p. 197). She further argues that social relations have three different facets that illustrate why relationships matter within evaluation practice. The first facet concerns the social relations within a program, such as those between program staff and participants. These relationships are part of the context of a program being evaluated and affect and influence program quality and effectiveness. As Abma (2006) notes, "it is not unusual to find social programs blossoming because of the charisma and dedication of a leader; nor is it unusual to find the same programs wither when the leader leaves" (p. 186). Program quality is affected by who the people in the program are and the kinds of relationships that have been established within that organizational context. The second facet refers to the relationships established between an evaluator and relevant stakeholders. These kinds of relationships also matter because they contribute to the kind of evaluative knowledge generated and communicate norms, values, and political commitments advanced in and by an evaluation (Abma, 2006). The third facet refers to the

potential disruptive nature of evaluation within the context of a program being evaluated. For example, evaluation has often been met with resistance or distrust because it has the power to disrupt the inner workings of a program, such as the organizational structure. These different social relations affect the quality of a program being evaluated and, thus, this calls for an evaluator to be responsible and attend to these dynamics of practice.

An additional point made by Abma (2006) was how the position of social relations between an evaluator and participants differs according to four evaluation genres. In the genre where methodology is the focus, such as in accountability ideology or policy-oriented traditions, the aim of an evaluator is to be neutral and objective. Relationships are of less importance or viewed as a "source of error" (p. 192). In more utilitarian evaluation traditions, such as that of utilization-focused, relationships play a functional rather than personal role. Relationships are instrumental in this genre because they are key in promoting and encouraging use and learning with and among relevant program stakeholders. In this genre, the role of an evaluator is more of a consultant rather than a judge or expert. Frequent communication and interaction is important in and for the evaluation process. In other evaluation traditions where social change is the focus, such as that of empowerment or democratic evaluation, an evaluator takes on the role of an advocate or social critic. As the aim is to establish "equal and just relations in society and the empowerment of marginalized groups in society," an evaluator purposefully engages and builds relationships with relevant stakeholders (p.194). The final evaluation tradition Abma (2006) discussed was that in which relationships are the primary focus. This means that the evaluator takes on the role of a facilitator or teacher and aims to foster dialog among and with program stakeholders that is open, safe, just, and inclusive. All in all, attention to how different evaluation traditions approach the relational dynamics is important because it highlights the complexity of

relationships within evaluation practice. It further illustrates that the building of relationships can have different underlying intents, which guides the type of relationships established.

In 2013, King and Stevahn published the book, *Interactive Evaluation Practice: Mastering the Interpersonal Dynamics of Program Evaluation*, where they provide a thoughtful overview of and practical approach to the interpersonal dynamics faced in evaluation practice. Within their book, King and Stevahn further advocate for the importance of interpersonal skills and argue that, to date, the field of evaluation has not adequately addressed the importance of it, a similar argument made by Abma (2006). King and Stevahn (2013) argue that evaluation is a "human enterprise" and that "it is simply wrong to say that if you're thinking about things interpersonally, then you must be engaged in what the field labels 'participatory evaluation'" (King & Stevahn, 2013, p. xvii).

Interpersonal dynamics are further influenced by the surrounding contextual circumstances of an evaluation. The importance of context is not new, as it is central to evaluation practice and has been extensively discussed within the evaluation literature. A recent example includes the New Directions for Evaluation (NDE) volume titled, *Context: A Framework for its Influence on Evaluation Practice* (Rog, Fitzpatrick, & Conner, 2012). Generally, context includes factors such as the site and location of the program, political and social climate, the environment, and other contextual factors that affect and influence the evaluation of a program (Greene, 2005; Thomas, 2004). "It includes the totality of the environment in which the project takes place" (Thomas, 2004, p.11). Furthermore, programs are often embedded within multiple contexts and levels, such as a program within a center within a community within the city (Greene, 2005). Evaluations are context specific and can affect "the interpretation of interpersonal interactions—for example, an evaluator's attempt at objectivity in

one context may be labeled a lack of cultural understanding in another" (King & Stevahn, 2013, p. 10). Patton (2005) introduced situational responsiveness as a way of emphasizing the importance of paying attention to not only the contextual factors, but also attending and responding to the surrounding situational factors that can affect the design and use of an evaluation. These situational factors can include "program variables (e.g., size, complexity, history), evaluation purposes (formative, summative), evaluator experience and credibility, intended users, politics, and resource constraints." (Mathison, 2005, p. 391).

Taking everything into account, these two dimensions of interpersonal skills and the surrounding contextual circumstances matter for and within an evaluation study. Furthermore, the importance of these dimensions of evaluation have been included—albeit conceptualized somewhat differently—by the developers of various evaluator competency frameworks. For the purpose of this study, I did not adapt one definition provided by a framework, but adapted my own understanding of these two dimensions to better suit the purpose of this study, which was to systematically gain insight into these two dimensions through the accounts of experienced program evaluators. I defined interpersonal competence (IC) as an evaluator's ability to effectively communicate, interact, and build relationships with those involved and affected by an evaluation, and I defined situational awareness (SA) as an evaluator's ability to appropriately assess and understand the surrounding situation and context of an evaluation.

Section Three: Review of Interpersonal Competence and Situational Awareness Across Developed Evaluator Competency Frameworks

I was able to locate online PDF documents and one book (Russ-Eft et al., 2008) that described and outlined evaluator competencies. I also only focused on retrieving frameworks that outlined competencies for program evaluators and did not include subject-specific competency

frameworks, such as essential competencies for qualitative evaluators (Stevahn & King, 2014) because I wanted to focus on taxonomies developed for the broad field of evaluation. In this chapter, I review the 12 evaluator competency frameworks that are listed in Table 2 on page 33.[2]

Overview of Evaluator Competency Frameworks

The majority of frameworks (8/12) provide a definition for competencies. For example, ibstpi defines competencies as "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that a competent evaluator must demonstrate to complete an evaluation assignment successfully within an organization" and ANZEA defines competencies as "the range of skills, knowledge, experience, abilities, attributes and dispositions needed to successfully practice evaluation in Aotearoa, New Zealand." Definitions provided are brief, usually one sentence, and center around the knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, and/or dispositions an evaluator needs to demonstrate competence as an evaluation practitioner. Furthermore, it appeared to me that the majority of competencies are written in output competence language. This means that based on my review of the competence literature provided in section one of this chapter, competencies focus on "what can be done" and observed. AES did not provide an explicit definition of competencies, and two of the frameworks (EES and UKES) use the term capabilities rather than competencies to "signal a broader interpretation and possible use." The framework developed by DeGEval does not use competency language, but instead provides descriptions for five categories (1. Theory and history of evaluation; 2. Methodological competencies; 3. Organizational and subject knowledge; 4. Social and personal competencies; and 5. Evaluation practice) with the aim of informing evaluation education and training.

[2] A more detailed table of these frameworks is provided in Appendix D.

All frameworks were developed within a specific context. This means that there is no framework currently available specifically developed for world-wide use. Each framework is situated within a specific context. For example, ANZEA's evaluator competencies are targeted towards promoting quality evaluation practice in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Additionally, Treaty of Waitangi principles underpin the framework, which aims to ensure the inclusion and participation of indigenous perspectives and worldviews. This was particularly evident when it came to competencies relevant to the broader category of SA, which I will next explore further.

The aim of the following review was to understand: 1) where in the frameworks competencies were positioned relevant to IC and SA and 2) what competencies were included in IC and SA?

Position of IC and SA in Frameworks

The position of IC and SA varied throughout the frameworks and was also labeled differently. First, both IC and SA were primarily included under the foundational professional dimension in two of the frameworks—the ECF endorsed by the South African government and the ibstpi taxonomy. These competencies, which were in the same category as competencies that also addressed ethical and credibility conduct, were regarded as essential and baseline skills for evaluation practice. In five of the frameworks (ECPE, CES, DeGEval, UNEG, and AES), IC and SA were identified as part of the main domains. As an example, the Competencies for Canadian Practice (CES) framework identified "situational practice" and "interpersonal practice" as two of the five overarching domains. In both the UKES and EES capabilities framework, IC and SA were sub-categories of "Professional Practice." Similar to the EES definition, the UKES competency framework's definition of professional practice was:

> "Professional practice refers to competencies in the field; the competencies evaluators need to ensure not only that they can conduct a credible, valid evaluation but that they

> have the interpersonal and political skills to manage the process. These include the ability to change course in a highly politicized evaluation context where the conditions to effectively implement a well-designed evaluation do not exist; to negotiate mutually conflicting interests and demands for different kinds of data; and to report conflicting evidence in sensitive ways. While knowledge of how to conduct evaluation is essential, quality evaluation depends equally on how evaluators act in the field" (p. 3).

In the remaining three frameworks, the placement of IC and SA was interspersed. For example, "contextual analysis and engagement" (SA) was one domain in the ANZEA framework, while competencies related to IC were dispersed under "systematic evaluative inquiry" and "evaluation project management and professional practice." The DFID framework is meant to identify the technical competencies of an evaluator while "people-related competencies" (IC) and "organizational competencies" (SA) are addressed within the main core competency framework developed by the overall DFID organization. Last, but not least, the IDEAS framework listed SA-related competencies under "professional foundations," while IC-related competencies were dispersed under "managing the evaluation" and "communicating evaluation findings."

In sum, competencies related to IC and SA were addressed—albeit differently—by all 12 frameworks. Additionally, six of the frameworks recognized IC and SA as a foundational part of the professional practice of evaluation.

Specific IC and SA Competencies

Overall, competencies related to IC and SA differed in how they were written and organized across all frameworks. However, I did make some overarching observations that are worth noting in an effort to better understand how these two domains are conceptualized across frameworks. First, interpersonal competencies generally revolved around an evaluator being able to:

- Communicate clearly and effectively—verbally and written
- Use negotiating skills

- Manage and resolve conflict/challenges that arise or ability to problem solve
- Work cooperatively/collaboratively and value teamwork
- Nurture and foster professional relationships within the evaluation
- Demonstrate cross-cultural competence or attend to issues of diversity and culture

In half of the frameworks, interpersonal competencies were not written in language specific to the practice of evaluation. For instance, some examples of listed competencies include: "writes fluently and communicates clearly" (EES); "uses sound negotiating skills" (UKES); and "uses verbal/listening communication skills" (ECPE). In more than half of frameworks, interpersonal competencies were defined using evaluation-specific language such as: "ability to respond appropriately to communications from internal and external stakeholders" (ECF); "negotiate to balance stakeholders views and acceptance of evaluation findings" (AES); "builds and maintains constructive relationships with partners, evaluation commissioners, and other stakeholders" (IDEAS); and "a demonstrated ability to develop collaborative, co-operative and respectful relationships with those involved in and affected by the evaluation (stakeholders) and evaluation team members by listening, including to what is not being said as well as what is being said" (ANZEA). Hence, some frameworks broadly listed interpersonal competencies while other frameworks listed them specific to the practice of evaluation. The variability in how interpersonal competencies are written across frameworks was not surprising given that interpersonal skills are complex in practice.

Second, competencies related to SA were either broadly written or specific to the evaluation context. For example, four of the frameworks listed two or more competencies that were generally written, such as: "demonstrate awareness of the politics of evaluation" (ibstpi®); "seek to understand the full context of an intervention by development, or reviewing and

revising as appropriate, its theory/logic to identify implications for evaluation" (IDEAS); "maintain awareness of the political implications of evaluation" (ANZEA); and "ascertains the social/political context and program logic" (UKES). Four other frameworks provided a longer list of situational or contextual competencies. Examples include: "determines program evaluability" (ECPE); "respects uniqueness of the site" (CES); and "weave contextual understanding into analysis, synthesis, evaluative interpretation, and reporting" (AES). Last but not least, four other frameworks provided more context-specific competencies that were relevant to where evaluation is practiced. One example comes from the UNEG framework that lists: "has a basic knowledge of the UN Agency, its key players, and programs and the distinction between programs." Another example comes from the ECF endorsed by the South African government: "knowledge of government systems included the government-wide evaluation systems, as appropriate."

In sum, in this third section, I aimed to shed some insight into how IC and SA are conceptualized across developed evaluator competency frameworks. With that aim, I divided this section into three p. First, I provided a brief overview of the 12 frameworks I located and included in this review. Second, I provided an overview of how IC and SA are situated across the frameworks. Third, I explored more in detail how competencies related to IC and SA were presented and written in the frameworks. My aim with this review was not to provide an in-depth systematic analysis of the frameworks in relation to IC and SA, but to provide a broad understanding of how these two dimensions are currently addressed and written within evaluator competency frameworks.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to develop a more thorough understanding of how interpersonal competence and situational awareness are conceptualized by gathering systematic evidence from experienced program evaluators. In this study, interpersonal competence (IC) refers to the relational social skills an evaluator draws on to communicate and interact with others (i.e., commissioners of evaluation, program staff, community members, and others) within an evaluation. Situational awareness (SA) refers to an evaluator's ability to analyze and understand the surrounding situational and contextual circumstances of an evaluation. The following research question guided this study: How and in what ways do experienced program evaluators describe aspects of interpersonal competence and situational awareness in their accounts of evaluation studies they have conducted?

Research Design

I decided that a qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009) utilizing semi-structured interviews was best suited for this study. Qualitative constructivist research primarily aims to understand the meanings individuals construct of a phenomenon. The nuances and complexities of human experience are emphasized and embraced within this design. Through a constructivist perspective, it is assumed that reality and meaning are socially constructed by individuals as they experience their world (Merriam, 2009). This design aligned well with the aim of my research, which was to explore, understand, and interpret how each program evaluator discussed and understood the interpersonal and situational dynamics of evaluation practice, based on her or his own evaluation experience. My research further aimed to understand each participant's views

regarding what contributes to IC and SA, in terms of skills, attitudes, knowledge, or other assets and experiences.

Although the design of qualitative research should be emergent and flexible (Maxwell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards & Morse, 2013; Rudestam & Newton, 2007), a basic research plan was necessary to guide this study. To that end, the following sections explain the rationale for selecting participants and procedures used in data collection and data analysis.

Participant Selection

The field of program evaluation does not have a formal process for regulating the practice of evaluation. For example, there are no explicit educational requirements needed in order to practice evaluation, and there is no explicit amount of field experience one should have before formally practicing as an evaluator. Anyone can claim to be an evaluator, which presented a challenge in clearly outlining what an "experienced program evaluator" entailed.

In light of this state of affairs, purposive, snowball, and sequential interviewing strategies guided the selection of participants for this study. First, a purposive strategy was used to identify individuals who could serve as "information-rich cases" and who could provide information most relevant to my topics of interest (Maxwell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). These individuals were selected from a group of evaluators who were formally recognized as outstanding by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and awarded the *AEA Alva and Gunnar Myrdal Evaluation Practice Award.*[3] This award is "presented to an evaluator who exemplifies outstanding evaluation practice and who has made substantial cumulative

[3] The *AEA Alva and Gunnar Myrdal Evaluation Practice Award* is one of the six awards offered by the AEA. The list of all awards can be found on the AEA website: http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=56. This is the only AEA award that formally and explicitly recognizes the practice of outstanding program evaluators.

contributions to the field of evaluation through the practice of evaluation and whose work is consistent with the *AEA Guiding Principles for Evaluators*" (AEA Awards, n.d.). Recruiting participants from this group yielded important insights into how recognized exemplary program evaluators discuss aspects of IC and SA based on their practical experience.

I identified a total of 12 recipients who received the award beginning in the year 2000, because I assumed that they would have evaluation experience that was most recent and, potentially, easier to recall and discuss during an interview. In addition, as evaluation practice changes with the times, more contemporary evaluators were more likely than evaluators from past eras to be knowledgeable about current issues and trends related to evaluation practice. Deciding on whom to invite to participate from this group of 12 recipients was done purposefully and in consultation with my dissertation committee. Because the group of recipients represents diverse points of views and evaluation genres, consulting with my committee members helped assure that I was being attentive to and inclusive of diverse evaluation standpoints. Employing my committee members—who all have extensive experience as evaluation scholar-practitioners and also know the work and practice of many who have been recognized as outstanding—in the selection of award recipients further helped with intentionally recruiting thoughtful participants who could shed the most insight on the topics of interest. The initial list of 12 was narrowed down to seven AEA award recipients to potentially invite to participate in this study.

I also utilized a snowball strategy (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) to identify additional program evaluators to interview for this study. The purpose for using this strategy was to make sure that, in addition to those who were formally recognized as outstanding practitioners, I also included a variety of experienced program evaluators. In particular, I was attentive to the professional role (i.e., academia, consulting) and area of practice (i.e., government, foundation,

large scale) of recommended evaluators. In gathering recommendations, I was also searching for practitioners whose primary profession was evaluation and who were conducting or recently had conducted evaluation studies. Recommendations were requested from 1) award recipients who agreed to participate and 2) my professional evaluation network. Within this request, I asked for recommendations of individuals whom these key informants viewed as good experienced evaluators who were also reflective and thoughtful about their practice. While I could have developed more specific inclusion criteria (i.e., 10 or more years of practical experience) for selecting participants, that would defeat the purpose of remaining open and inclusive, since the primary focus was to intentionally select participants from diverse backgrounds and contexts and with diverse ways of conducting evaluation.

Last, but not least, I used sequential interviewing to further guide the selection of participants as the study progressed (Small, 2009). The logic and power of this strategy lies in viewing each participant as a case (Small, 2009). Each case "yields a set of findings and a set of questions that inform the next case" (Small, 2009, p. 25). Through this process, each case is deliberately chosen and interview questions are refined as a researcher's understanding of the phenomenon develops and expands. Similar to theoretical sampling (Glaser, 1978), participant selection is "directed by the emerging analysis, and the theory being developed from data [is] subsequently modified by data obtained from the next participant" (as cited in Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 76). For example, during the mid-point of the interview process, I recognized that several of the interviewed evaluators overlapped in their theoretical approach to evaluation and tended to fall within the educative/use and responsive/culturally responsive evaluation genres. In response, I intentionally searched for evaluators who were viewed as more policy-

oriented in an effort to uphold my commitment to gathering information from a variety of evaluators' experiences.

A total of 30 evaluators were identified and considered in recruitment. I began the interview process with the seven identified AEA award recipients. A total of four AEA award recipients participated in this study (two did not respond to the study request and one was not contactable). The remaining 23 out of the 30 identified evaluators were recommended by my dissertation committee (8), by invited[4] or interviewed participants (13), and by my professional network (2). Six did not respond to the study request, and six were not contacted either because they were part of a group of evaluators recommended by the same interviewee or they demonstrated a background similar to those of invited AEA award recipients. A total of 15 evaluators participated in this study—four award recipients and 11 per recommendations. I provide a detailed description of the evaluators who participated in this study in the results chapter.

Data Collection

I conducted this study over a 7-month period. With University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (#15553) approval (see Appendix A), participants were initially contacted via email, in which I introduced myself and the study. Those who agreed to participate were emailed the informed consent information and, once the interview was scheduled, I also emailed them a copy of the interview guide to give them a sense of the questions I would be asking. An IRB-approved consent script was read to participants, and oral

[4] Three invited evaluators, who were recommended by interviewed participants, declined to participate due to limited client interaction or no recent evaluation work. One of the three evaluators provided a recommendation per my request.

consent was obtained before the start of the interview.[5] Oral consent was obtained because all participants were located at some distance from me, and allowing participants to provide oral consent significantly helped to make the process go smoothly for those who agreed to participate.

In this study, I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, which is a common practice in qualitative interview research studies. This was beneficial because I was able to appropriately respond and adapt according to how the data were being collected and analyzed. For example, during the semi-structured interview, I was able to remain flexible and open to following the flow of what the participant was sharing. I adapted my questions (i.e., the order and wording) to the interview conversation. As previously mentioned, I was also able to adjust the recruitment of evaluators to better align with the focus and purpose of this study. While Merriam (2009) notes that being the primary instrument can risk a researcher's biases influencing the study, "rather than trying to eliminate these biases or 'subjectivities,' it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p. 15). Details on how I monitored "subjectivities" and potential biases are discussed in the data quality section of this chapter.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. There are several benefits to conducting semi-structured interviews, including the ability to explore what cannot be directly observed (i.e., individuals' intentions) and to access the perspective of an interviewee "with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p. 6; Patton, 1990). This method often employs a conversation style where the researcher predetermines the parameters of interview topics, guides the interviewee during the discussion,

[5] Per IRB's approval, oral consent was audio recorded to formally document consent to participate.

and adapts the conversation by matching questions "to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share" (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4).

This method was best suited for this study for three reasons. First, the aim was to understand what it means to communicate effectively, build and maintain professional relationships, and attend to the surrounding situation of an evaluation from the perspective of practicing, experienced, program evaluators, especially from those recognized as exemplar practitioners. Second, the focus was not on a particular evaluation situation, but on how program evaluators described aspects of the interpersonal and situational dynamics (both successes and challenges) that they faced and navigated within their evaluation practice, which could include multiple and different evaluation situations. Third, the aim was to recruit evaluators who were diverse in professional role, location, and area of practice, which called for a research method that could cut across geographical boundaries.

As participants were geographically diverse, I conducted individual, online-video and telephone interviews.[6] Skype was used for two interviews I conducted, which allowed for virtual face-to-face interaction. Utilizing a program, such as Skype, allowed me to take note of behavioral information, such as body language, that provided additional insight into the participant's experience during the interview. While participants were provided with the option of participating via online-video or telephone, 12 chose to participate via telephone. Opdenakker (2006) noted limitations to conducting telephone interviews, which were relevant to this study. First, the interviewer is unable to observe interviewee's social cues, such as body language. Another risk includes the inability to also observe the surrounding environment of the interviewee, which can potentially interrupt or influence the interview. As a response to these

[6] I was only able to interview one participant in person since we both attended the same conference during the data collection time period.

risks: I confirmed the amount of time allotted before the start of the interview; I verbally checked in as the interview was getting close to the allotted time (an example of what I would ask included: "We are mid-way through this interview, and I wanted to check in and see how you're doing"); and I paid close attention to the interviewee's voice and tone and verbally affirmed throughout the interviewee's responses (verbal affirmations included: " uh-huh," "hmm," "okay") as a way of indicating that I was actively listening and paying attention to their responses. I also provided brief recap statements after each main question was answered as a form of checking that I was accurately understanding their responses. The interviews, which were audio-recorded with participants' permission, lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Of the 15 interviewed evaluators, I followed-up with three evaluators for additional clarification and examples from practice—each of these follow-up interviews lasted about 20 minutes.

Interview Guide

I used an interview guide (Appendix C) to help focus conversation around my specific topics of interest. An interview guide was best suited for my study because while it provides focus, it also provides flexibility in how questions can be asked (i.e., structure, wording of questions), and it helps ensure that the same general information is collected from all participants. The development of the interview guide structure and questions were guided by the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) technique, which has been widely used in competency research (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The purpose of the BEI technique "is to get behind what people say they do to find out what they *really* do. This is accomplished by asking people to describe how they actually behaved in specific incidents" (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 115). The primary focus of the interviews in this dissertation study was to learn about the ways in which program evaluators understood and enacted interpersonal competence and situational

awareness by eliciting examples from their practice. I believed this to be a superior approach to general inquiries about what respondents do, what they think they do, or what they think they should have done in particular evaluation contexts. I decided to structure the interview guide to focus on specific situations related to professional relationships (IC), communication (IC), and situational learning and awareness (SA). An example of a question included:

- Tell me about an evaluation where you felt a successful and trusting relationship was established with either a client, program participants, or other relevant stakeholders?
    - If you would walk me through that relationship and talk about what you specifically did to build/foster that relationship?

As new information and viewpoints emerged in the interviews, I subsequently modified and revised the guide (Patton, 1990).

The interview guide was pilot tested to clarify any misunderstandings of the questions and to determine which questions were difficult for interviewees to understand (Merriam, 2009; Weiss, 1994). Pilot interviews were conducted with five program evaluators who were identified through my professional network and who were recognized for being thoughtful and reflective evaluation practitioners. As a result of these pilot interviews, I made two significant changes to the guide. First, I originally had organized the interview guide to inquire about communication, building relationships, and situational awareness, in that broad structural order. However, I noticed that pilot interviewees had a difficult time discussing communication techniques outside of the context of relationships established. For example, one of the communication questions I asked was about a time where the evaluator felt he or she had communicated well or effectively. This response was often embedded within the type of relationship that was established in which this communication took place. I decided to switch the order to begin asking about establishing

relationships and probed about communication within those questions. Out of the three communication questions listed, I only kept the question on communicating difficult or unpleasant information, as that yielded some initial rich responses. The second change I made to the interview guide was to condense the number of questions asked related to building and maintaining relationships and to situational awareness. More specifically, the questions that were found to be confusing were also found to be redundant and were removed or further revised.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the interview data inductively,[7] meaning that the findings presented in the results chapter are grounded in the data collected (Bailey, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection, which allowed for a continuous and progressive focus on collected data (Maxwell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Following are the steps I took to collect, organize, and analyze the data.

Following completion of an interview, I developed a contact summary sheet (Appendix C) for each participant (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was done in an effort to organize and summarize the data gathered from each interview. On this sheet, which was generally one page, double sided, I summarized the interview and documented a reflective overview of what took place during the interview. The development of this sheet helped with critically thinking about and informing the next interview (e.g., considering new or remaining target questions for the next interview) and reorienting myself with this participant when I returned to the data at the end of data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

[7] I acknowledge that a "pure" inductive process is not realistic because I cannot escape all biases and assumptions I have of the world.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a contractor. After interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each transcript and modified as needed (i.e., clarifying words and sentences) while listening to the audio file. I also did this as a way of reviewing and removing any identifiable information provided by interviewees (i.e., names of projects, organizations, locations). I further assigned a pseudonym first name to each interviewee as a way of protecting her or his confidentiality and maintaining a sense of personality to each interviewee. Audio files were deleted after data analysis was completed.

I printed each interview transcript with a large margin on the right-hand side, which provided space to make marginal remarks (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 67). As each interview transcript was read and reread two to three times, I made marginal notes regarding phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that struck me as potentially relevant to and useful for the purposes of this study (Merriam, 2009). After this step in the process, I decided to focus the analysis on 13 of the 15 interviews, which provided the richest information that was relevant to the topics of interest. The two excluded interviewees discussed evaluation practice in a more abstract manner and minimally discussed their own practical experience. These data were challenging to analyze, given the study's focus on practical examples of IC and SA drawn from practice of selected evaluators.

The next step in analyzing each interview was to use the process of initial coding (Bailey, 2007), also sometimes referred to as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process allowed me to reduce and simplify the data into manageable segments of text. For example, the statement "We hadn't planned for a site visit at this time, but we just decided that it seemed like going in person was the only way that we were going to be able to break through" was coded as "flexible/adaptable." After open coding each interview, I made a visual depiction of all the codes

that were relevant to IC and SA. This visual depiction is similar to making a list; however, this was visually easier for me in moving to the process of focused coding, also sometimes referred to as axial coding (Bailey, 2007). Through this process, I was able to further reduce the data "by identifying and combining the initial data into larger categories that subsume multiple codes" (Bailey, 2007, p. 129). For example, taking the statements, "I'm not going to force them to do something that I can see they don't value" and "They know I'm an expert; I don't have to act like it" were put into a category called "consultant mindset." Subsequently, the initial codes were organized into 20 categories that were assigned a description based on the process of focused coding. For example, the "consultant mindset" category was described as:

> An evaluator walks into an evaluation with no one agenda or set way of conducting an evaluation. An evaluator is open to learning about the project, especially at the beginning of an evaluation, with the goal of being appropriately helpful and relevant to a project.

These 20 categories were further organized into five broader themes: "Attitudes"; "Evaluation as Collaborative Service"; "Trust and Credibility"; "Strategic and Intentional Communication"; and "Situational Awareness." The aim for identifying these five themes was to further condense the categories developed. An example of this initial coding process can be found in Appendix D.

Peer Debriefing Process

Before finishing data analysis, I utilized the process of peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a step towards establishing credibility for this study's results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that the peer debriefing process should be about "exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and or [with the purpose of] exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). The role of the debriefer is to critically challenge an inquirer's thinking, hypothesis, and assumptions. A

debriefer is someone who takes this role seriously and can play devil's advocate "even when it becomes apparent that [doing so] produces pain for the inquirer" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 309). For these reasons, I choose one peer debriefer who exemplified these characteristics, who was familiar with the overall focus of my study, and who studied and worked in the field of program evaluation.

I provided the independent peer debriefer with the interview guide, research questions, and paper copies of three interview transcripts—the transcript of Hayden, a consultant with five years of evaluation practice with a primary focus on implementation and process evaluation; the transcript of Colin, a consultant with ten years of strategic planning and evaluation experience; and the transcript of Greg, an evaluation scholar practitioner with 20 plus years of evaluation experience. I selected these interviewees for the peer debriefer to review because each provided rich examples from practice, they worked in different contexts (i.e., consulting, academia), and they differed in years of evaluation experience. Before meeting, I asked the peer debriefer to review the three transcripts and make marginal notes relevant to the topic of interest—IC and SA. I also provided the peer debriefer with the general definition of IC and SA as used in this study. I did not share the initial coding process developed ahead of time because I wanted to encourage the debriefer to conduct an unbiased review of the provided interview transcripts.

I met with the peer debriefer for two hours. I began the meeting by reviewing the study purpose and research questions and sharing my initial coding process. Then, we discussed the debriefer's observations and marginal notes. There was noteworthy overlap between the debriefer's observations and the 20 categories that I had developed through the focused coding process. The five themes were then revised and the following nine themes were developed to more appropriately capture the 20 categories:

A. Evaluator's view of the purpose and role of evaluation
B. Trust and credibility
C. Evaluator's dispositions
D. Evaluator's experience and reputation
E. Intentional learning and continuous understanding of the project
F. Cultural self- and situational-awareness
G. Understanding perspectives and expectations specific to evaluation
H. Purposeful and situationally appropriate communication
I. Thoughtful framing of evaluation information

The final step in data analysis was to review and code each interview transcript with these revised themes and aggregate the data according to each theme. I created a visual depiction that listed the themes by interviewee as a way of visually understanding the extent to which each theme was discussed across interviews. Table 3 illustrates the visual depiction used. The first three columns in the table list general demographic information for each participant—name, years of evaluation experience, and position role. The remainder of the columns list the final themes:

- "D" refers to "Dispositions"
- "R & EK" refers to "Reputation and experiential knowledge"
- "A" refers to "Intentional project learning and understanding"
- "B" refers to "Cultural self and situational awareness"
- "C" refers to "Keen understanding of the perspectives and expectations relevant to evaluation"
- "D" refers to "Purposeful, ongoing, and responsive communication"

- "E" refers to "Thoughtful framing and sharing of evaluation information"

An "x" was used to indicate a theme was discussed; an "Ex" was used to indicate a representative example/quote for that theme; a "DEx" was used to indicate that a different example/quote was provided for that theme; and an "NC" was used to indicate a negative case for that marked theme.

Table 3

Theme by Interviewee Visual Depiction

Name	**YRS**	**Position**	**D**	**R & EK**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
1. Hayden	5	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x, Ex*		*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex		*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex
2. Dahlia	10	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x, Ex*	*x*	*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex	x	*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex
3. Colin	10	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x*	*x*	x	*x*, Ex	x	*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex
4. Cara	10	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x, Ex*		*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex	x	x
5. Vanessa	20	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x*	*x*	x	x	*x*, Ex	x	x
6. Daria	20	Leadership Practitioner Role		*x*	x				
7. Gloria	25	Academic Professor	*x*	*x*	*x*, Ex	*x*, Ex	*x*, DEx	x	x
8. Greg	25	Academic Professor	*x, Ex*	*x, Ex*	*x*, Ex		*x*, Ex	x	*x*, Ex
9. Sylvia	30	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x*	*x*	x	*x*, Ex	x	x	*x*, Ex
10. Havana	30	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x*		x	*x*, Ex		*x*, Ex	x
11. Sam	40	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x*	*x*	x	*x*, Ex	*x*, DEx	x	NC
12. Olivia	45	Academic Professor	*x*	*x, Ex*	*x*, Ex		x		
13. Robert	45	Leadership Practitioner Role	*x*	*x, Ex*	*x*, Ex		x	*x*, Ex	

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the extent to which readers conclude that the researcher has conducted his/her study in ways that produce confidence in results, allowing readers to believe and trust in the results (Bailey, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This "does not mean that the reader necessarily has to agree with the researcher; rather, it requires that the reader [can] see how the researcher arrived at the conclusion he or she made" (Bailey, 2007, p. 181). I discuss the trustworthiness of this study by focusing on the factors of credibility and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Credibility refers to the level of confidence a researcher has in his or her findings and how adequately such findings represent interviewees' own understandings of evaluator interpersonal and situational competencies (Bowen, 2005; Merriam, 2009). To address the concept of credibility, I first relied on member checking. As previously mentioned in the data analysis section, I provided brief recap statements at the end of each main answered question as a way of confirming that I was accurately hearing and understanding an interviewee's responses. During this process, interviewees were also invited to correct my interpretations. All interviewees generally replied with a variation of "Right," "That's right," Yep, uh huh," "Exactly," and "Yes, absolutely." One interviewee in particular mentioned that "When you restate what I said, what you say always sounds a lot more coherent than the way I think I've said it…I really appreciate that." The majority of evaluators also elaborated on their responses after I provided a recap of what I was hearing.

Following the interview, I also sent ten of the interviewees a one-page summary of my overall interpretations. By sharing my preliminary findings, the interviewee was able to recognize his/her experience and possibly suggest revisions that could help better capture his/her perspective (Merriam, 2009). I stopped sending one-page summaries after I observed that the

member checking was a better venue for checking my interpretations, as I had their full attention for 60 to 90 minutes, depending on the interview. I also did not receive any additional comments or edits on the summaries sent. Second, I used the peer debriefing process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was described in the data analysis section.

Third, the diversity of the selected participants further contributed to the credibility of the results. The focus of participant selection was not on selecting participants from a specific area of study (e.g., education, public health) or from a particular setting (e.g., nonprofit, private/consulting, government), but on gathering a range of information-rich experiences that could help shed insight into the practice of experienced evaluators relevant to IC and SA. As suggested by Shenton (2004), "individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs, or behavior of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people" (p. 66). The understanding I constructed of IC and SA pertains to evaluators who practice evaluation in diverse contexts and who have diverse histories and backgrounds.

Confirmability refers to the findings being a reflection of the participants' perspectives and experiences, not a reflection of the researchers' perceptions. As a contribution to confirmability, I maintained a hand-written journal throughout the life of the study, using the outline of prompts set forth by Silverman (2005). With this outline, I continually reflected on: direction of data analysis, including dead-ends, ideas, problems and surprises and my own personal reactions to what I was hearing and learning from the interviews (p. 251). I also made the following coding notes to differentiate journal entries and passages:

- Methodological Notes (MN)—included messages to myself regarding the collection of data

- Theoretical Notes (TN)—included hunches, hypotheses, and critiques regarding what I was doing and thinking
- Personal Notes (PN)—included feeling statements about the research process
- Limitations (L)—focused on perceived study limitations

This documentation process also served as a self-reflective process through which I addressed and brought forward, as much as I could, biases and assumptions that could potentially influence the process of the study (Bowen, 2005). This was done with the understanding that qualitative research requires a great level of self-awareness from the researcher, precisely because the researcher is the primary instrument and data collection is inherently influenced by a researcher's feelings, thoughts, experiences and values (Maxwell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERVIEW RESULTS

The results presented in this chapter were guided by the following research question: *How and in what ways do experienced program evaluators describe aspects of interpersonal competence and situational awareness in their accounts of evaluation studies they have conducted?*

In the first section of this chapter, I describe key characteristics of the evaluators who participated in this study. These characteristics provide context for understanding who the evaluators are and the nature of the circumstances in which these evaluators work. Next, I discuss two sets of findings. First, I discuss two underlying factors—dispositions and reputation and experiential knowledge—that were found to inform how evaluators talked about IC and SA. I then discuss five themes related to evaluator competencies that emerged from the data analysis process. The first three themes of "Intentional project learning and understanding," "Self-awareness and cultural consciousness" and "Understand the perspectives and expectations relevant to evaluation" pertain to understanding situational awareness (SA). The remaining two themes of "Purposeful, ongoing, and responsive communication" and "Thoughtful framing and sharing of evaluation information" refer to interpersonal competence (IC).

Description of Interviewed Evaluators

Following is an overview of the 13 evaluators whose responses were included in the data analysis. The purpose of this overview is to give a sense of who participated in this study, [8] as an important framework for interpreting the study results about the meanings-in-action of two complex dimensions of evaluator competence. I began each interview by asking evaluators about

[8] The process for participant selection is described in detail in the Methodology chapter of this study.

their background in order to help me better understand their practice as the interview progressed. I specifically asked about their years of evaluation experience, the type of evaluations they recently conducted (i.e., large-scale, domestic), and generally about what informed their practice (i.e., evaluation approach, guiding framework).

The majority of evaluators were female (9/13). The group and had an average of 25 years of practical evaluation experience (minimum was 5 years and maximum was 45 years). Approximately two thirds had doctoral degrees (9/13), and one third had Master's degrees (4/13). A large portion (10/13) held leadership practitioner roles (i.e., director, senior associate, independent consultant, principal investigator) and practiced domestically (U.S.) and/or internationally. The remainder (3/13) were academic professors who primarily practiced evaluation in the U.S. Additionally, three evaluators had worked in a foundation context and one worked within the U.S. government. Last, over half of interviewed evaluators (8/13) worked within a specific area or subject matter (including philanthropy; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education; health services; services for people with disabilities; and professional development and training). In sum, those who participated in this study were primarily U.S. evaluation practitioners who worked within a specific content area and who had formal relevant U.S. educational training (e.g., Ph.D. in Community Psychology, MUP in Urban Planning, MPP in Public Policy). This is important to note as their points of view and experiences may be considerably different than evaluators practicing in other regions of the world or in other discipline areas.

Ten of the 13 evaluators discussed specific frameworks, theories, or commitments that informed their evaluation practice, and the remaining three did not elaborate beyond their commitment to meeting the needs of the client. As outlined in Table 4, four evaluators drew on

multiple evaluation/research theories, two followed a practical strategic process, and four oriented towards a commitment to a particular form of evaluation practice.

Table 4

Evaluator's Approach to Evaluation

Guiding Framework	**Evaluator**	**Specific Framework/Theories/Commitments**
Evaluation/Research Theories	Cara	Participatory, utilization-focused & developmental
	Vanessa	Utilization-focused & developmental
	Dahlia	Utilization-focused, empowerment, & culturally-responsive evaluation
	Gloria	Community-based participatory research (CBPR) & empowerment
Practical Process	Colin	Developing a logic model, evaluation questions, data plan & data management plan
	Hayden	Research/review, developing conceptual framework & evaluation questions
Commitments	Havana	Learning orientation as a way of promoting evaluation use for decision making
	Sam	Improvement and effectiveness orientation to help projects be better
	Robert	Evaluation through a diversity lens
	Olivia	Evaluation is a process of delineating, obtaining and providing useful information to decision makers
Evaluation approach depends on needs of the project	Daria	Did not label understanding of evaluation
	Greg	Did not label understanding of evaluation
	Sylvia	Did not label understanding of evaluation

I wanted to note that the first four of the 13 interviewed evaluators that are listed in the table did not draw on one way of conducting evaluation but shared that they drew on multiple evaluation theories (Alkin, 2004), with one of them also drawing on community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles (Gloria). This finding is not surprising given that it is common for

evaluators to adapt and use aspects from multiple evaluation theories to inform their practice (Bledsoe & Graham, 2005; Christie, 2003).

Evaluators' Perception of the Purpose of Their Evaluation Work

Evaluators' perceptions about the purpose of evaluation was primarily service-oriented. This information became evident during the data analysis process where phrases such as "I think of evaluation in terms of, I'm here to serve," "Our job is to get them to focus," and "The role of evaluation is to improve, not just to make the judgment" kept coming up in evaluators' responses to IC- and SA-related interview questions. I discovered that a large portion of evaluators viewed evaluation as a service where the role of an evaluator was to provide information and services that were useful and relevant to clients. This meant that the role of an evaluator was to go beyond making (objective) professional judgments, but to also help projects improve, learn, and move forward. The focus of interviewed evaluators was often on short-term professional interactions and relationships that were informed and guided by the needs and interests of clients. For example, Greg focused on helping clients understand and make sense of evaluation information in fast-faced political environments. His approach to interactions was not so much about building long-term trusting relationships, but about adequately and efficiently meeting the needs of clients. This was evident through his interview responses such as:

> In some cases, [clients] don't need me to know much at all. They give me the data, and I'll make sense of that part of it. Other times, you need to be part of a team. It depends what they need.

As another example, evaluators such as Colin, Havana, and Olivia—who slightly differed in what informed their practice—emphasized that the role of evaluation was to help clients focus and narrow the scope of the evaluation. This understanding of the role of evaluation called for facilitation-type interactions and relationships. Daria was an example of an evaluator who did not

have a specific view of evaluation beyond evaluation serving as a methodological tool for addressing the needs of the client.

I was able to better understand this service-oriented view through the verbal accounts of three evaluators. These evaluators explained that they recognized that, within their work, evaluation is often times not the dominant structure of a project. In other words, a project is the primary focus while the evaluation of such a project is secondary. Colin explained that:

> The dominant structure is the goal of the project, and the project managers are attempting to accomplish their own goals, and so we are supposed to be working with them to help them know if what it is they are implementing is having an impact. There are some types of evaluators out there where the evaluation is sort of like the primary construct. I'm thinking of [a specific organization]…where they do randomized design, and the funding for the project comes through the evaluation. So in order to get the funding, you have to agree to the terms of the evaluation, and so the evaluation becomes like the dominant structure. We don't have any of those kinds of projects…we have to be responsive to what the client is doing.

Greg and Havana similarly shared an understanding that evaluation is just one of the many components that contribute to the overall decision-making process of a project. In further understanding what this means, Greg compared it to the practice of evaluation itself:

> if you're an evaluator, you don't simply talk to one group of people when you're doing the evaluation. You might have different people in different agencies; there's different stakeholders. You wouldn't take just what one stakeholder has and say, "Here's the answer." Congress is the same way. We're one of the things they're looking at. There's no reason why they shouldn't look at lots of different things. Our evaluation is one of them.

This provided additional insight into the purpose that evaluation needed to fulfill given that "clients work in highly politicized environments, and evaluation is not always most critical to their everyday [work]" (Havana).

A small number of interviewed evaluators further believed that this service provided through the practice of evaluation should be done in partnership with the client(s) and/or community. Their perception of the purpose of evaluation emphasized partnership-type

interactions and collaborative relationships beyond meeting the needs of client(s). For example, Hayden and Sylvia emphasized partnership and collaboration throughout the evaluation process. Dahlia and Gloria very closely drew on empowerment evaluation theory principles. For Dahlia, it was about working with and for the community to empower them to take ownership and create sustainable change. Her approach was to establish long-term relationships that were geared towards connecting on a personal level (i.e., sharing about who she is as a person) and learning about the political factors that affect not only the program, but the surrounding community. For Gloria, it was about building and sustaining long-term relationships that were mutually beneficial, so it went beyond serving an accountability role. She was also one of the few evaluators who emphasized investing the time necessary to build relationships, which meant her way of becoming situationally aware was more than what other evaluators discussed (i.e., volunteering at events, co-developing grants, and co-presenting at conferences).

Evaluators' view of the purpose of their evaluation work, in combination with what informed their practice, demonstrates the variability in what influences and motivates evaluation practice. More specifically, this demonstrates that the end goal for evaluators differs. For example, the way Olivia discussed relationships was different from how Gloria talked about them. Olivia was guided by the philosophy of serving the client, while Gloria was guided by the aim of establishing long-term relationships that benefited her as the evaluator and benefited the community with resources and grant funding. An evaluator's view also informed how much he or she should learn about the context that would be relevant to the project being evaluated.

Part One Findings: Underlying Evaluator Factors That Play a Role in IC and SA

During the analysis process, I discovered that two factors seemed to underlie how evaluators understood and talked about IC and SA. These factors include evaluators': 1)

professional dispositions and 2) reputation and experiential knowledge. While these factors do not directly answer this study's question in regards to how and in what ways program evaluators describe aspects of IC and SA in their accounts of conducted evaluation studies, these factors do provide a contextual framework within which they enact their understandings of IC and SA. In other words, evaluators discussed IC and SA through their professional lenses that are based, in part, on their dispositions and experiences. This suggested that understanding the professional identity of evaluators was key to better understanding IC and SA.

First Factor: Evaluator's Dispositions

The first factor that played a role in how evaluators addressed the relational (IC) and situational (SA) dynamics of evaluation practice were their professional dispositions. The term disposition refers to an individual's tendency to behave in a certain manner and "can be identified in the action a person takes in a particular situation—for example someone who is disposed to be 'curious' will demonstrate this in the manner in which they consistently generate questions and investigate problems" (Shum & Crick, 2012, p. 3). While evaluators did not directly use the word disposition, it was an interpretation I made during the data analysis process. Evaluators did not refer to just one disposition throughout their practice, but referred to the multiple dispositions of openness to learning, active listening, flexibility, and demonstrating a "consultant" mindset.

The first disposition that was discussed was the importance of being open to learning and willing to listen. What this meant was that evaluators intentionally paid close attention to not only body language and what was explicitly shared (i.e., verbal, orally, written), but were also attentive to what was unsaid. Greg articulated this disposition further by drawing on his experience as a clinical psychologist:

> It's called hearing with the third ear or seeing with the third eye. In other words, you attend not just [to] the content of what people are saying, but you're trained to attend and process, "What is going on here? Is this a friendly conversation? Is it a hostile one?" And so those are process skills. In clinical psychology, a client comes in and talks about a problem. On the surface, you're hearing, "This is what the problem is," but you're trying to listen to something deeper than that.

This was a helpful explanation provided by Greg because interviewed evaluators would allude to these "process skills," but were often unable to further describe the origin of this disposition. For example, Sam mentioned that he didn't know if this was anything that could be learned out of a manual or "cookbook" because it was just a way of being: "You just try to be trustful, and you try to listen without judgment and listen with understanding, and that goes a long way, frankly. So it's not a technique beyond respectful and intentional listening."

Openness and active listening are important within the scope of this study, especially for an evaluator's IC, because this disposition or way of being was found to underlie what it meant to serve and attend to the needs of clients and/or the community while also considering the situational, political, and overall contextual circumstances that surround the project being evaluated. By "hearing with a third ear and seeing with a third eye," evaluators were able to demonstrate a commitment to the evaluation work by acknowledging the experiences of others and productively responding to the interests of those served, especially if those interests shifted throughout the evaluation process. Additionally, this disposition facilitated the establishment of a professional connection and degree of trust with those being served because it showed that the evaluator was acknowledging, paying attention to, and responding to what was being said (and unsaid). As Olivia described an evaluation she conducted for a client who was a faculty member:

> [She] wanted to do a specific type of analysis, complex, heavy-duty statistics, and I don't really think her quality of data justifies doing this. I talked to her about that, but they wanted it, and we've got it, and it's done. It's meeting the needs of the client; she wants that, we provided a well done, well-thought-out answer to what she wanted to do. It's not what I would have chosen to do, but she believes that's the best thing for her and her situation, and that's going to provide them the best information.

This example from Olivia's work highlights the importance of not only being open and listening to what the client needs, but also being responsive to those needs. As Olivia acknowledged, while this way of doing evaluation did not match her methodological preferences, her goal was to provide an evaluation that was relevant and useful to the faculty member, especially to the faculty member's surrounding academic situation in which this information was going to be shared.

The second disposition that was discussed was the importance for an evaluator to be flexible and adaptable. This disposition went beyond stating that evaluators were flexible. They also needed to demonstrate flexibility, for example, by skillfully and strategically adapting the evaluation to meet the needs of a project. This, in turn, often contributed to a degree of trust and credibility accorded to the evaluator, as his/her adaptability was done with the intent of providing useful and relevant evaluative services. Part of this disposition had to do with the understanding that nothing in this world is static. Projects change and evolve, especially projects that expand over a long period of time. Evaluators have to "roll with the punches" (Colin) as evaluation is a practice conducted in service of something else. To further illustrate this disposition, Dahlia provided this example:

> Our new governor has cut funds to things like violence prevention, youth employment, and youth development, which has affected one of our key partners in the community. They do all of those services, and we do evaluation with them, and so them getting cut affected their programming, which also affected our evaluation and caused us to shift focus from the evaluation to creating a report to advocate for the funds to be re-instated, because that was the need of the community. Not only are we doing our evaluation work, but we had to pause that evaluation work to focus on creating this report to build an argument for the governor to reinstate funds.

This demonstrates the importance of remaining flexible and, in Dahlia's case, responsive to what the community needed. Again, this highlights the understanding of evaluation as a service and

hence, evaluators are attuned to providing an evaluation that is not only useful but relevant to the project's interests and surrounding contextual circumstances.

Last but not least, the importance of demonstrating a "consultant" mindset was also discussed by interviewed evaluators. This meant that evaluators were cognizant about displaying evaluative-related knowledge and expertise in a manner that was productive, helpful, and relevant, which aligns with the prominent view of evaluation as a service. Evaluators also discussed the importance of demonstrating an open mind and approaching an evaluation with no one set agenda but with a set of possibilities of how an evaluation could be conducted. The aim here is to play more the role of a consultant instead of that of an evaluator, which at times carries negative connotations (i.e., accountability purposes, judgment, distant observer). For example, Cara expressed this clearly in her explanation of how she approaches her evaluation practice: "I'm not coming in with this intention, idea in mind where it's this design or no design at all, this is how I want them to engage with me, and there's no other alternative." Within this mindset, evaluators also discussed the importance of not being afraid to push back and strategically challenge ways of thinking in an effort of fostering an open conversation that ties back to assisting a project to improve and move forward. It was evident this was a strategic and delicate balance evaluators navigated between meeting the needs of the client while also "not agreeing to everything that the client wants" (Cara).

In summary, I want to emphasize that these dispositions were presented here separately but worked together in evaluation practice where much of the work is fluid and context-dependent. These dispositions of being 1) open to learning and willing to listen, 2) adaptable and flexible, and 3) displaying a "consultant" mindset were found to often inform or play a key role in the interpersonal and situational dynamics that interviewed evaluators discussed.

Second Factor: Evaluator's Reputation and Experiential Knowledge

The second factor that was found to influence how evaluators discussed IC and SA was their reputation and experiential knowledge. For nearly all interviewed evaluators, gaining a reputation and experiential knowledge as an evaluator and/or within a certain field played a key role in how evaluators interacted, communicated, and built relationships, which are skills related to IC. This was also found to inform how much an evaluator invested in learning about the surrounding context of an evaluation, which is related to SA. For example, since several interviewed evaluators were highly experienced and knowledgeable in a particular subject matter and had well-established reputations within the evaluation field, they sometimes did not speak directly about IC and SA. Rather, they referenced their extensive experience and reputation as grounds for building relationships and/or understanding the context. In other words, by having accumulated experiential knowledge and a reputation over time, evaluators did not discuss specific activities or tasks that informed how IC and SA was addressed within an evaluation. Following, I present examples from interviewed evaluators that illustrate this finding.

Robert, who has over 45 years of evaluation experience, exemplified a great deal of in-depth understanding of the political and environmental dynamics that come into play when working within the foundation world. In discussing what it meant to build a relationship with a foundation officer, he explained:

> I'm not going to be buddies with the people at the foundation. I need to really understand, however, the pressure that the program officer is under. It's easy for me to do that, because as I said earlier, I have worked a great deal of time in the foundation world, so I know the pressure program directors face in justifying large-scale projects like the one we were going to evaluate.

This quote exemplifies how his extensive experience within the foundation world contributed to his tacit knowledge that guided what it meant to build a professional relationship within a specific context and what contextual information he needed to learn for that relationship. Greg,

who has 25 years of evaluation experience, also drew on his extensive evaluation work within the government in discussing his interactions within that context. Working in a policy-oriented field, he understood that his role was less about collaborating and building relationships but more about providing the needed information. To both Robert and Greg, it was not so much about getting to know the client on a personal level, but about conducting relevant and quality evaluation within fast-paced political environments, which was contextual knowledge built through their experience.

Another aspect that was helpful for building and fostering SA was building experiential knowledge and a reputation within a particular subject area (i.e., health, computer science). This allowed evaluators to focus more closely on the project and gather more specific project-related knowledge. Colin is an evaluator who works within the field of professional training and development. He and his firm tend to focus on projects that address this subject matter because they are knowledgeable about "how community colleges operate and job training community organizations. We know funding streams, policies that affect best practices nationally, and as time goes on, we continue to learn more." For additional learning, Colin would use a logic model to help explore and investigate other relevant information. Hence, by having built this background knowledge, he doesn't have to do as much up front because he knows much of the surrounding contextual circumstances when stepping into a new professional-development-related project. Vanessa is another example of a practitioner who worked in philanthropy before moving into the field of evaluation. Through that experience, she was able to understand the culture of philanthropy, which now greatly informs her role as a manager of evaluation for a philanthropy-focused foundation.

Experiential knowledge and a reputation are also helpful in establishing a baseline of trust and credibility within projects being evaluated. For example, Olivia has built her experience and reputation as an evaluator within the STEM field for the past 45 years of her professional experience. Her background in science education is helpful when evaluating STEM-related programs as she often also understands the program content. With time, she has come to be known and well-respected as a knowledgeable STEM evaluation practitioner, which provides a foundation for her interactions and relationship-building within an evaluation study. She shared that:

> A lot of the people that I work with already know me or know of me. It's not like I go in cold, and they've never heard of me. I have a reputation, and I think that that is certainly helpful. I think that I have a powerful position; people know me in the field, trust my judgment. I have a lot of information that people trust and value, so I think that makes a difference. I don't think you have to have the background expertise in that discipline, but it certainly helps.

Overall, the influence of a reputation and experiential knowledge is not surprising given that I interviewed highly experienced evaluators who have developed a sense of professional identity and an understanding of what evaluation means to them. I'll admit that at times, this presented a challenge for extracting specific skills from interviewed evaluators in relation to IC and SA. For example, it was difficult to hone in on the skills and knowledge when I asked follow-up questions such as "How did you know how to do that?" or "Where did you draw from to navigate this communication?" Greg, Dahlia, and Daria often mentioned just knowing how to do things in certain situations. In inquiring about what informed Dahlia's decision to conduct focus groups for the purpose of learning more about a community, she paused and responded, "I don't know if there was any one place where I got that, just experience." Aside from this challenge, I believe that these findings brought to light the aspects of evaluators that come into play when it comes to IC and SA. For example, identifying specific evaluators' dispositions

provides a partial understanding to what informs the complex and context-dependent dimensions of practice—IC and SA. I believe these findings provide substance for thinking further about the competencies that define IC and SA that relate more to what an individual brings to the situation.

Part Two Findings: Understanding SA and IC

In this section, I discuss five findings that were well supported by my interviews with the 13 evaluators who participated in this study. Evaluators pointed to three critical aspects of SA which included intentionally learning about a project, attending to the cultural dimensions of an evaluation, and understanding stakeholder perspectives on and expectations for evaluations. They also identified two important aspects of IC, including purposefully engaging in communication at the start and implementation of an evaluation and mindfully framing and sharing evaluative information. Before moving forward, I want to acknowledge that often times these findings were noticeably intertwined within the accounts of interviewed evaluators; however, I am distinguishing them here with the aim of better understanding IC and SA separately.

Intentional Project Learning and Understanding

Learning about a program and its context was intentional and primarily takes place at the start of an evaluation study through the use of various strategies, such as interviewing staff members, setting up working groups, interviewing relevant stakeholders, or attending and observing project activities/sessions. Evaluators, especially those who work with projects that require travel, emphasized that it is key to incorporate different ways of learning within an evaluation as it requires time and a reasonable budget.

The first step in this project and contextual learning process is gathering project-related, relevant information, such as the grant proposal, previous evaluation plans, internal memos, and

implementation plans. Some evaluators left this decision up to the client(s) to send information viewed as relevant for the evaluation. The next step was to make use of tools such as logic models, concept mapping, or process mapping to help outline and understand the specifics of a project. Colin, for instance, tended to focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of the nuances of projects through the strategic use of logic modeling. Similarly, Sylvia and Hayden used some type of mapping to visually and succinctly depict their understanding of project activities to clients. For Colin, Sylvia, and Hayden, utilizing these strategies also served as a communication tool, which will be further discussed in the section "Purposeful, ongoing, and responsive communication."

An important component of this first step is to also remember to ask questions. Gloria, for example, emphasized the importance of explicitly asking "a lot of why, how, and who questions" because you are looking "for how to get to know the program better; how to get to know them better; how to get to know the context better of the agency, the community, the contextual factors." Olivia also touched on this when discussing her process for working with projects outside of her STEM-related expertise. She shared that she reads a lot and also asks questions to learn from the project managers. In discussing an example from evaluation work she did related to art education, she explained that:

> I might just go cruise around art journals. So I wanted to understand the debate in the field about creativity versus disciplinary based, and can you actually teach art as opposed to let your spirit be free? So I read up a little on that, and I think that's really useful, and then you can come with questions to your people. I would ask the project managers, "Well, I was reading this, what does that mean?" and then they would, of course, they always love to talk about their field, so no problem getting them to explain things to you then they trust you more; they've indoctrinated you into their belief system.

As she articulates, reading and asking questions also helps to build trust and credibility, as this demonstrates to project managers that she is invested in and is actively learning not only about

the program, but also about the field in which the program is embedded. Asking questions is not only about gaining knowledge, but it is also about better understanding the client and further demonstrating a level of commitment to and investment in a project.

Qualitative methods, such as interviews, onsite visits, and focus groups, are intentionally used in the early stages of an evaluation in addition to those first steps and strategies. For example, Havana described conducting interviews with staff and, depending on a project, with grantees and partners to better understand the work being evaluated. In discussing an example from working with a local parenting program, Dahlia shared that she not only sat through the workshop training provided to program facilitators so that she "could learn more about the program," but she also conducted focus groups at the community level to explore what the community expected and wanted from the program. Focus groups with the community is slightly different from what other evaluators did because, as previously mentioned, Dahlia was guided by a commitment to community empowerment and thus continuously looked for ways to also engage with the community in which a program was embedded. Sylvia shared that she dedicates time to observations and, when she struggles with understanding project activities, spends time with program staff to learn about the program better.

Onsite visits were emphasized especially by evaluators who worked on projects that required travel. For instance, Sam explained that there was no replacement for onsite visits, because they expand an evaluator's knowledge beyond the program to include an understanding and awareness of the surrounding landscape and environment. He further elaborated by saying that the landscape includes "the cultural landscape, the place and setting. And I mean, when you're in rural America, you notice things that you would not have noticed without being there," which influences, in one way or another, a project. One caveat to intentionally conducting onsite

visits is cost and time, which Hayden acknowledged as she discussed onsite visits for one of her professional training and development projects:

> We try, if the budget allows, early in the evaluation to do site visits. So, in this example we spent time at all of the partnering colleges that [were] part of this evaluation. And so we went in and spent time with the folks overseeing the grant implementation. We sat down with all our relevant stakeholders, which were identified through the review of the proposal and project leadership, and then we put a lot of time into interviewing all the stakeholders at each of the colleges. We did interviews pretty much all day. We toured the sites and saw the projects and the equipment that they bought, and then we would interview the faculty and students, if possible, and any of the staff that are involved in implementation. And I think that just shows that you're interested in learning, you're in listening mode, and there's nothing that can beat that face-to-face time, if you can do it.

This quote highlights the amount of time Hayden invested in not only visiting the sites, but in also engaging with the project through interviews and touring the sites. Onsite visits provide several opportunities for building situational knowledge; however, these visits need to be intentional and strategically planned.

An additional aspect of this learning process includes the ability to demonstrate the knowledge gained and that "you've done your homework" (Cara). Hayden provided a good example of what this looks like from one of her evaluation projects:

> I was in an interview, and I had done a little bit of research, beyond the formal material that was shared about the project. I had just poked around on the Internet to see what was out there about this project. And I had found a PowerPoint presentation. And I noticed that they made a point of saying something about their reputation in the community and ensuring that they get some good press coverage. And I couldn't find anything in the press about them. And I had looked around, and I just couldn't figure out what that was about, and so when I was in the interview, as we talked for a while, I asked them, "Did you have a negative public experience?"…and I think if I hadn't seen it and [been] able to ask them about it, that they wouldn't have mentioned it. They were actually impressed that I found it, and it seemed to [have] somehow established more trust with me. I asked about it gently, but I did know about it, and they seemed to respect the fact that I had done my homework.

This quote is valuable because it highlights that it is not only about learning about a project and its surrounding context, but it is also about strategically using that information that, in this case, helps with establishing some initial trust in the evaluation process.

In sum, learning and understanding a project takes time. While much of the learning takes place at the beginning of an evaluation study, this learning is monitored throughout the project, especially as projects often change and evolve. Additionally, the purpose of learning and understanding is not only about gaining knowledge, but it is also about building trust and credibility for the evaluation. For this reason, evaluators demonstrated an underlying commitment to this process by utilizing different strategies and venues for learning—attending project trainings, asking questions, visiting sites, conducting interviews, and strategically demonstrating the knowledge gained. The use of different strategies also highlights the disposition of being open to learning and willing to listen. One word of caution was provided by Greg, who emphasized that it also all depends on what is needed and to remember that "there's different expectations for different situations."

Self-Awareness and Cultural Consciousness

Part of SA includes attention to the cultural dimensions of a project being evaluated. Understanding culture often goes beyond ethnicity or race, as it refers to the learned and shared values, beliefs, and practices that influence and shape human behaviors, such as norms, customs, and other forms of living (Butty, Reid, & LaPoint, 2004; SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004). In other words, culture can refer to the dynamics of a group of people, such as that of an organization or a project. I wanted to explore the notion of culture through the interviews in order to further understand how it might be situated within SA. For this reason, I asked evaluators a version of the following two questions near the end of the interview:

- Please describe an evaluation where you had to adapt to a culturally different environment and talk about the steps you took to learn in that and about that environment?

- In your opinion and reflecting on your practice, what would you say are the key ingredients in demonstrating cultural responsiveness? And could you talk about this through an example (examples) of how you made these "ingredients" work for you in your practice?

I purposefully did not provide a definition of culture because I wanted to allow them to discuss it from their own point of view and experience. More than half of the evaluators interviewed shared the ways in which they attended to culturally-relevant dynamics based on their evaluation experience. Two evaluators were not able to discuss culture separately (Robert and Gloria), as it was at the core and center of their practice. For example, Robert shared at the start of the interview that he viewed evaluation through a diversity lens and discussed his practice through that lens. In my interpretation, this was an example of how for some evaluators, culture "is an undeniably integral part" of a program, which cannot be easily separated out when conducting an evaluation (SenGupta et al., 2004, p. 6). The remainder of this section is separated into three parts: self-awareness, humble approach, and cultural consciousness.

Self-awareness. One of the key ingredients in demonstrating cultural responsiveness as an evaluator is the ability to have sense of understanding and recognition about who one is as a person and as an evaluator and how that may influence the dynamics of an evaluation. This includes being willing to bring to light and be honest about potential biases and assumptions that might be relevant in an evaluation context that is culturally different. For example, Gloria shared:

> If somebody has a lot of biases about working with gay and lesbians. If you have a lot of biases that you can't overcome, then you can't go on doing evaluation with an agency that serves people who are gay and lesbian. Or if I have any biases or stereotypes about Latinos, I'm Latina myself, but what if I think that Latinos who are immigrants are poor and lazy…my biases are going to influence the lens I put on that help with the evaluation.

As Gloria notes, an evaluator needs to be open to recognizing what he or she, as an individual, is bringing to an evaluation because, inherently, this influences the lens through which one conducts an evaluation. Here, I have to note that the disposition of being open to learning is highlighted. If an evaluator holds certain assumptions about a specific group of people with whom the project works or serves, and the evaluator is not aware of or honest about these assumptions, this can negatively influence how an evaluator carries him or herself within that evaluation. This is particularly relevant to IC, because this can influence how an evaluator interacts with that group of people.

Evaluators such as Sylvia, Havana, and Colin talked about the importance of recognizing one's background, and in their case, it revolved around being aware of the notion of "White privilege." Sylvia and Havana were explicit about this in the sense that they addressed it within their interview responses. Sylvia shared:

> Even though I didn't come from a privileged background, I'm still White, and I understand…that inherent in our societal structure there is White privilege. And to go and ask a person of color to be a research participant, do they feel like they can say no to me? And so really working to convey, "It's okay if you don't want to do this," and letting them be comfortable with that and not coming in with some sense of, "I'm the researcher and I'm important." I mean, it's just a matter of recognizing those kinds of things.

For Sylvia, and Havana shared a similar sentiment, this inherent privileged expectation of being White within the U.S. was important to recognize and be aware of, especially when stepping into culturally different environments. This was important because, as Sylvia mentioned, being aware of this notion helped her be aware of how others could potentially perceive her role as an evaluator, which comes into play when interacting and communicating within an evaluation. Colin talked about this differently and shared a more strategic approach, which also appeared to contribute to his IC within his evaluation work. He was not as explicit about his awareness of "White privilege" as Sylvia and Havana, but he did share that he was aware of the fact that he

was a White male from the suburbs who had attended private colleges. For him, this was relevant because many of his evaluation projects consist of working with individuals from "poor, urban neighborhoods" who potentially have different lived experiences. Hence, he mindfully and strategically approached his evaluation work, especially when it came to engaging with program participants, with the intention of being clear, transparent, and straightforward. As he explained:

> My philosophy, which I don't think has been wrong, is that I'm transparent about what I'm doing, not disingenuous...asking the questions in a straightforward way, not dumbing down or demeaning…I was doing an interview with one of the participants, and she was telling me a story about how she was homeless and had engaged in prostitution within the year before she enrolled in this project. And I don't know if there was really anything that I was doing that made her feel like she could share those things with me. All I did in that situation was explain to her what the evaluation was, what the point of the project was, the nature of the questions that I had, and then asked the questions.

As this quote demonstrates, being straightforward for Colin was also about establishing a tone of respect with participants by being mindful of not asking the questions in a "disingenuous" or "demeaning" manner. Colin was not able to further articulate what other dynamics were at play but conveyed a strong commitment to upholding his intention of being clear and transparent with and in his evaluation work, especially when it came to interacting with project participants.

Cara, who also mentioned the importance of acknowledging personal biases and assumptions, discussed that a key ingredient in being culturally competent included an awareness of one's power as an evaluator. She explained that evaluation has the power to "perpetuate inequality or help promote equity," and for her as an evaluator who primarily worked on disparity-related evaluation projects, this was important to recognize. Self-awareness included an "understanding [of] the role of data and the role of evaluation in affecting programs that affect people's lives" (Cara).

Different strategies were suggested by evaluators that would be helpful in elevating a sense of self-awareness. For example, Cara mentioned creating opportunities to talk about these

topics, especially if an evaluator is working within a team. Sylvia discussed spending time with other people and "learning to be comfortable around other people who aren't like you." Gloria was one of the few who stressed immersion within a community and utilizing the strategy of self-reflection to document the experience. As she described:

> Immersion experiences with the community of interest. Firsthand experience where you go visit even if it makes you uncomfortable. Walking around a mostly African-American neighborhood in a heavy urban city, visit, immerse yourself into the other culture. And then use self-reflection. We are all cultural beings. But we also hold stereotypes, biases about other groups. We need to engage with individuals who are different from us within communities of interest and then reflect.

Humble approach. In regards to navigating the cultural aspects of evaluation practice, it is important to be an attentive listener and open to learning, which was one of the evaluator dispositions I discussed in part one of the findings. However, the way in which interviewed evaluators talked about being an attentive listener and open to learning in a culturally different context appeared to embody and convey a humble approach. Evaluators did not use the word humble directly, but rather humility was something that I interpreted based on their interview responses. For instance, in answering the question about adapting to a culturally different environment, Hayden talked about a project that she worked on with Native American tribal high schools:

> We're not walking in with any assumptions about…just because we've done a lot of work at high schools, we haven't done a lot of work at tribal schools, and so it was a really new experience, and it was really important for us not to think that anything that we knew would be applicable in the tribal school setting. I feel like this is all very esoteric the way that I'm framing this, but I think in this particular instance, it was just really important to be in listening mode and to not come in with any sort of expectation that we were experts on their setting or their experiences.

I believe that this is an example of how listening and being open was different in this sense, because she also touched on being careful not to act as an expert. The Merriam-Webster (2015) dictionary defines humble as "showing that you do not think of yourself as better than other

people." This was the sense I got from Hayden and other interviewed evaluators' responses in regards to working in culturally different communities. This can also be better understood by Havana's story of an "awakening" experience her colleagues had about how vital a humble approach can be:

> Our team was three White people who had Ivy League education and, again, these are kind people, and they entered the room, and I think most of the people in the room were African Americans [from] the community. And my colleagues were really beaten up, verbally, and rightly so, because they came with a certain kind of White privilege orientation that they weren't even aware of; of course, they weren't even aware of that. They didn't learn enough about the community and the issues facing the people of color in that community, and they came in appearing to know more than we actually did, or not knowing what they needed to know—maybe that's [a] better way to put it. And people in the room were angry with my colleagues…And I've heard that from many of us internally; we had several awakenings, if you will, around what we needed to do differently.

This experience not only illustrates the importance of self-awareness; it also demonstrates that embodying a humble approach is challenging and something that is learned and further defined through experience.

Cultural consciousness. In working in and with culturally different environments, it is important, as an evaluator, to broaden one's scope of understanding beyond the context of the project. In other words, interviewed evaluators were committed to not only learning about the project, but also learning about the surrounding economic, historical, and political landscape. Interviewed evaluators shared different strategies for doing that, which were more specific than what I discussed within the previous finding of "Intentional Project Learning and Understanding." I want to also note that this learning was more in the sense of being conscious of this information because, on some level, it impacts a project being evaluated. It is important for a competent evaluator to be prepared and up to date on what is happening, not just with the

project, but also with the surrounding situational and contextual circumstances of the project, which is a demonstration of SA.

Cara, Dahlia, and Hayden explicitly discussed doing "your homework" (Cara) and intentionally building your cultural situational knowledge. For example, Cara talked about subscribing to the local newspaper as a way becoming familiar with the "most salient political issues that have come up recently" and therefore, that was one way of becoming informed about what was happening in the surrounding context. Hayden shared that she would start with the grant proposal because, often times, information was provided about "the local, economic context, whatever the job situation is, the educational level of folks, [and] the typical socioeconomic factors." However, she talked about supplementing that knowledge with additional research:

> I think researching online and reading about the area or the program that's involved can be really helpful, just to see, are there any case studies about the particular participants or people? Has that area been in the news in the last few years? Have there been any big factory closures, any sort of big event that's happened that everyone feels impacted by, that you probably should at least know has happened, so that you're conversant in the environment and in the recent history?

Dahlia also shared a similar approach to broadening her cultural knowledge, where she and her team tracked "through media, radio, news" the broader context surrounding a program:

> …keeping track of what is happening in the surrounding city and how things are going. The police department or the alderman are making decisions for or against the community, and how that influences community members…We collect secondary data on the community level. So, how many resources does that community have? There was also some mapping that already took place, so we can use that secondary data, and now we know how many churches and what churches there are. How many schools and what schools there are, how they're performing.

Onsite visits were also discussed in supplementing knowledge about the surrounding environment. This was a strategy that evaluators talked about in the previous finding of "Intentional Project Learning and Understanding." However, in this case, evaluators talked about

branching out and visiting surrounding historical places and engaging with the local community members. Engaging with the local community was important because an evaluator could really get a glimpse of how certain contextual factors are or have affected the surrounding community. For example, Cara explained:

> And talking to people about the past, for example if you're working in the community and you're looking at education issues, you ask people, "So what have been some of the…How have politics affected the education system, or the way education is delivered in the state?" So you're talking to people, and you're engaging in those discussions, so that you're also learning about how people think.

In sum, SA includes attention to the cultural aspects of an evaluation. For some evaluators, culture was an integral part of their practice, which I believe presented a challenge in talking separately about culture and evaluation within the interview. Other evaluators emphasized three ingredients in understanding and attending to culture within evaluation practice. First, it is important to be aware of who one is as a person and evaluator. That's a key step in working in and with culturally different environments. Second, in addition to being an attentive listener and open to learning, conveying a humble approach as an evaluator was also key in working with culturally different environments. Third, broadening one's scope of understanding beyond that of the project and attaining a level of cultural consciousness was the third ingredient in demonstrating cultural responsiveness. I have to note that the first two parts of this finding are also relevant to IC, as being aware of who one is and conveying a humble approach contributes to productively and adequately interacting and communicating within an evaluation that may be situated in a culturally different context.

Understand Perspectives and Expectations Relevant to Evaluation

An aspect of SA that is important for evaluators to explore and understand are the perspectives and expectations of evaluation. What I found particularly interesting about this

finding was the reasoning behind the importance of gathering such information at the start of an evaluation study. Interviewed evaluators were well aware of the certain reputation or assumptions that come with being an evaluator, such as an evaluator serving as a quality control or distant judge. As a result, the challenge that evaluators often faced was conducting an evaluation with limited-to-no trust in the evaluation process from the perspectives of the client(s) and/or relevant stakeholders. As a way of addressing this challenge, evaluators emphasized that establishing an initial degree of trust was key. Without trust, there was little chance the evaluation could generate information of value to the project and community and little chance the evaluation could be of service to the project (a value held by many interviewees). Following are some representative comments from evaluators who discussed the importance of establishing trust:

> If people don't trust me, they are not going to tell me what they need to tell me (Havana).
>
> I think if trust is not there, it makes the evaluation really much more difficult because it's much more, "Let me see what you're going to do first." It's trying out all the time, so you can't really move forward until you've established that (Olivia).
>
> If people don't trust you as an evaluator with their challenges, then you can't really help them. And so I think it's just human nature a little bit to…when evaluators come out, just like when the funders come out, everybody shines their shoes and puts on their smile and tries to show the best side of their project that they can, which is great. And you want to be able, I think, as an evaluator, to help them showcase the successes. But you also need to be able to get to what the challenges are in order to help the folks involved overcome those challenges. And if they don't trust you with their problems and if they don't trust you as a partner, they're not going to show you the warts, and so you're not going to be able to really be much of use to them (Hayden).
>
> I think trust is a very important [necessity] in order to really be able to do an effective job. But as you probably know, an evaluator is typically given the same sort of response as an auditor. They see it as an independent quality control, accountability type of entity. So what I've been really intentional about doing is focusing less on the accountability side, even though obviously that is one of the reasons why you would undergo an evaluation, and really leaning toward the learning side (Vanessa).

As these quotes demonstrate, trust plays an important role in delivering relevant and useful evaluation services. Purposefully exploring, learning, and becoming aware about the perspectives and expectations of an evaluation is one clear strategy that can help establish professional trust in a process that is, at times, met with anxiety, fear, and resistance.

There are different strategies that can be used for gathering information relevant to understanding the perspectives and expectations relevant to evaluation. For example, some evaluators utilized logic modeling (Colin, Greg) or concept mapping (Sylvia, Hayden) to not only learn about the workings of a project, but to also explore the purpose and need for an evaluation. Others also mentioned explicitly asking for previous evaluation reports. There were some evaluators who shared more specifically questions that they aimed to answer to uncover this information. For example, Cara made it a point to ask a client first about their previous evaluation experience and then about what they were hoping to learn from the evaluation:

> "What's your past experience with evaluation? What's an example of a situation that you felt that it went well? And what's an example of a situation where you felt it didn't go well?" So for me, that allows me to kind of gauge where the person's coming from and…it will give me a sense of whether that person's going to be intimidated by my role because they may think I'm judgmental or excited, because they've had such great experience in the past so I think that question allows me to sort of formulate a little bit of that understanding. And then the next question is, "What do you want to learn from the evaluation? How is the evaluation going to be useful to you?"

This quote exemplifies the importance of having this conversation early on in the evaluation process, because it helps an evaluator gauge where the client is coming from and the perception the client might hold towards "an evaluator" or the process of evaluation, based on negative or positive previous evaluation experience. This quote also highlighted the importance of the evaluator dispositions of being open, willing to listen, and displaying a "consultant" mindset. These dispositions are particularly useful when certain purposes or messages need to be

uncovered through what is being verbally shared. For example, Greg explained that evaluators need to ask themselves:

> "[Does the client] really want an answer, or are they doing the evaluation because they want to embarrass somebody? Are they doing it because they have to impress funders?" Those are things that evaluators need to understand. People often do summative evaluations when there's no summative decision to be made.

Again, this reiterates the importance of paying attention to what is beneath what is being shared. Another strategy was shared by Vanessa, who aims to have a conversation around the level of evidence a client needs to make decisions. For example:

> If someone says, "I need 100% evidence to be able to be confident that I can make a decision," then you know that the type of evaluation approach that is going to align with that type of person and that type of decision-making structure is very different from someone who says, "I need 60%-40% confidence that I'm moving in the right direction." And so just asking that question ["What is the level of evidence you need to make a decision?"] during your ramp-up as an evaluation firm is really relevant to informing the evaluation design and process.

Gloria provided an example of how not exploring previous evaluation experience at the beginning of an evaluation could affect an evaluation, especially when it came to establishing a sense of trust. As she shared:

> Instead of the usual one month building the relationship, it took us about two or three months…Once the staff realized that our intentions were genuine, that our intentions were not to just, "Give me data; we'll publish it, and send the report in the mail," they changed. And we noted that change…We came to a meeting one day, and they started giving us bear hugs. And one of the staff said, "Now we know you well. We are comfortable and know what your intentions are." We discovered that they had just ended a relationship with an academic institution…they opened up and said, "We were hesitant to collaborate with you guys because we just finished a collaboration of six months with [a] university, and we were all ecstatic, "They're going to help us." And we gave them all our files, and they came twice, did a report, never met with us to discuss it, sent it in the mail, and it's here collecting dust. And we're just really furious because we were promised a lot of stuff." So I think that we need to be careful…and sometimes you walk in, and you don't know what experiences they have had.

The next level in understanding the perspectives and expectations of evaluation is also understanding the organizational climate around the practice of evaluation. What are the views of

the broader organization towards evaluation? In what kind of political climate is the current evaluation study situated? What is important here is again being aware. For example, Dahlia talked about an evaluation she conducted where a culture of evaluation was not there during the first year of the study. She believed that this affected the extent to which the evaluation results were used. In starting the second year of the evaluation, she made it more of a point to involve site leaders and "go even deeper, so that they're making decisions along with the evaluation process." What also helped during the second year was having someone within the organization who championed the evaluation. Sylvia shared a different experience where she worked as an internal evaluator for a school district where there was no culture or champion for evaluation. For 11 months she worked within an organizational dynamic that to her, did not value the evaluation, even though it was a requirement due to the fact that the school was part of a larger funded project. However, no one was interested in the evaluation and, thus, there was not much that she could do because "nobody was making them participate."

In sum, the practice of evaluation is at times met with resistance, anxiety, or fear. Thus, intentionally learning about and understanding the perspectives and expectations that clients or relevant stakeholders may hold about evaluation is a key aspect to being situationally aware. Establishing some degree of trust at the beginning of an evaluation further helps move the evaluation towards being a useful and relevant practice.

These previous three findings of "Intentional project learning and understanding," "Self-awareness and cultural consciousness," and "Understand perspectives and expectations relevant to evaluation" were primarily relevant to SA, although aspects of IC were also at times addressed. SA, as a reminder, refers to an evaluator's ability to adequately assess and attend to the surrounding contextual circumstance of an evaluation. The findings presented in this study

were more relevant to assessing and being aware of the project and surrounding context. These findings were also key for an evaluator to address at the beginning of an evaluation study because this assessment helped shape the design and implementation of an evaluation. The next two sections are relevant to IC, which refers to an evaluator's ability to efficiently communicate and relate to others involved in, affected by, and working on an evaluation.

Purposeful, Ongoing, and Responsive Communication

The communication process within an evaluation study has to be purposefully and strategically planned. Moreover, evaluators have to be willing to continuously assess forms of communication in order to appropriately adapt and be responsive to changes in a project being evaluated.

First and foremost, interviewed evaluators emphasized the importance of establishing a communication strategy at the beginning of an evaluation study. This was important because "failing to pay attention to this communication dynamic can be very hazardous to the successful implementation of the project" (Robert). Thus, establishing and negotiating early on some form of communication schedule—weekly, bi-weekly, monthly—with relevant stakeholders is part of conducting sound, high-quality evaluation. However, not all interviewed evaluators approached establishing initial communication in the same way. For example, evaluators such as Cara and Hayden were purposeful about establishing "a lot of touch points" at the start of an evaluation as a way of clarifying evaluation expectations and making sure that everyone was on the same page. Cara further explained that this communication was "definitely a combination of in-person and by phone." Hayden tended to have a call schedule for "generally speaking every two weeks throughout the life of the project." For evaluators, such as Greg and Robert who often worked within highly politicized environments, communication depended on the needs of the client.

Furthermore, much of the communication was fast-paced and "oriented towards reports for the government" (Greg). Colin was somewhat of an exception because he intentionally utilized a logic model as a communication tool at the beginning of an evaluation process. This was particularly useful for him in working in and for projects that had multiple stakeholders. In talking about a 6-year project that was a collaboration across six schools in five states, he explained that:

> As you get farther away from the people that organized the project, the less familiarity there is with, everybody understands this is professional development but not everybody knows the finer points of the project. And so the logic model is a useful tool in communicating with the folks that are in kind of the far reaches of the project about what it is they're supposed to be doing. You do kind of, in that process of talking to the different people and organizations in the project, surface areas where, "Oh, I didn't know that that was a part of this, and we're not going to do that." It is, in a way, useful not just from our point of view as evaluators understanding how the project is working, but also from the project manager's point of view in surfacing misunderstandings and what's happening in the project.

The use of a tool such as a logic model helped Colin facilitate conversations across a project that included multiple individuals across schools and states. Through the use of this tool, he was able to not only learn about the particulars of a project, but also helped surface potential misunderstandings and establish a common understanding when it came to the evaluation process.

Moving into the implementation phase of an evaluation, interviewed evaluators discussed the value of preserving, to some degree, ongoing communication throughout the life of an evaluation. This also meant that this communication was not only to be evaluation-focused, but it was also about being present and engaging in the workings of a project. For example, evaluators expressed the importance of making it a point to attend project meetings and conference calls as a way of staying up to date with the logistics of a project. Furthermore, evaluators discussed, either directly or through the sharing of examples, that ongoing communication served multiple

purposes. For example, Havana touched on several reasons why she and her team engaged in continuous communication:

> We gave them updates on our progress…we might share a theme that we're beginning to hear and wanted their feedback on that—we did that with, I think it was one or two people we stayed in contact with every other week. Constant communication is always critical. It helps the client be confident that we're on track. If there are questions that we have, they can answer them, give us updates, things that have happened outside of the specific scope of work but that could influence our work. So that helped us adapt if we needed to. By the time we got to our findings…the [client] was so open and they trust, because we worked so closely with them in designing it...the president invited us to facilitate two meetings with his executive staff, where they actually went through every single finding and recommendation and made an action plan for how to address them. In this case there was an openness, and because we had the trust and continuous communication…

As Havana explained, echoing much of what other evaluators said, ongoing communication allowed for opportunities to share bits of evaluation information as it was being collected, facilitate feedback, provide evaluation updates, and gather project updates that might be relevant for the evaluation. Additionally, Havana touched on the fact that by closely involving the project in the evaluation process, it helped establish and foster a sense of trust in the evaluation activity because the client was aware and kept up to date of what was happening in and with the evaluation. The establishment of ongoing communication has the potential, as in Havana's case, to encourage attention to and use of the evaluation findings.

Dahlia also added that fostering ongoing, open communication helped keep the evaluation relevant and responsive to the needs of a project she was working on with a community partner:

> Our communication has been really open, really fluid; we have multiple ways of communicating with each other, from telephone, email, but in particular, because they have kept us abreast of what's been happening with them and in their organization, we've been able to respond really well as far as things that they might need. For instance, they said, "Oh, the funder is asking for what data we want to focus on in the conversation," so I was able to develop a one-page on both process and outcome data that we may want to look at throughout our time together. I got that to him; he brought it to a meeting; the

> funder loved it. So, having that really open, back-and-forth communication and being able to respond quickly to their needs has been really helpful.

As Dahlia notes, ongoing communication is also influenced by how much a client wants to and can be open with the evaluators, because this is a two-way process.

The other aspect of this finding is related to an evaluator's ability to assess a situation and appropriately respond and adapt the communication. For example, sometimes an evaluation study might flow well to the point where constant "check-in" is no longer required. In the case of Colin, he shared how at the beginning of the evaluation of the project with multiple stakeholders, they had scheduled weekly calls with a main client for the first 6 months. As time progressed and things were running smoothly, Colin decided to "dial it back to every other week and the calls are often pretty short." Other times, the evaluation situation calls for the utilization of different strategies. For example, Sylvia shared that she learned to pay closer attention to "the different types of people," as not all clients called for the same kind of communication. She explained:

> I used to work with an organization…and I felt like it was not, the person there, she's really nice, very professional, but I had a really hard time connecting with them...It was a successful project. I gave them a good product, and it went up on their website, and they used it a lot. But I never quite felt that rapport that I felt with my other clients. Most of my clients are social workers, and they're much [easier] to engage. This woman was an attorney, so she had a very different style of engagement, and I don't think I attended enough to that…It's just really important to think through different types of people. I think if I entered into another type of contract with someone who's more formalized, I would be a little more proactive in setting up a more formalized communication process because that's a bit of how they were.

Through her experience, Sylvia learned that not all communication could be the same, and one way to assess that was through paying attention to the personalities, engagement styles, and ways of being of potential clients. Another example comes from Hayden's evaluation practice where she had to make an unplanned site visit to help move the evaluation forward. Her account demonstrates the importance of being attentive and willing to adapt to what is happening with a project, as sometimes a shift in communication is exactly what is needed. Her account comes

from an evaluation project where the project leader was hired late, and the project implementation was running behind schedule. The leader was also very defensive and "adversarial" towards the evaluation. In an effort of changing this situation, Hayden decided to conduct a site visit, which was not initially in the evaluation plan, but because the evaluation was not progressing, she explained:

> I just decided that it seemed like going in person was the only way that we were going to be able to break through. I didn't know if it would work or not, but it was sort of the best shot that we had at making progress. I went, and I spent a day and half on site with them and talked with all the people involved…and I found that after that visit, the relationship with [the project leader] changed completely. I think it was definitely the face time with her, but also the face time with the other people involved. It was a 180, and I think it was because she heard feedback from the people I interviewed that it went really well. And I was able to write a report about the site visit that painted the project—and that certainly talked about the challenges—but also I was able to find some successes to highlight. And I think that that made her feel better and feel like I was not…I wasn't looking for problems, I was on her side sort of. And I think she just didn't realize that until she saw it in writing and heard from the other people with whom I interacted. And it just really seemed to shift the relationship entirely.

This unplanned site visit made a difference in successfully moving the evaluation forward. Through Hayden's account, we can see how being attentive and willing to adapt the means of communication can impact not only the evaluation, but also the relationships established with those who are a part of a project, such as the project leader and program staff. Additionally, she shared how this was not something she directly discussed with the project leader in the sense of, "I never said, 'Boy, you were kind of a pain, or you were a real jerk at first, but now you're pretty nice. So what happened?'" It was something Hayden observed following her site visit, especially with the follow-up written report. The project leader was delighted with the written report, and Hayden believed it was "something about the report itself—seeing it in writing, and the findings, and the way that I framed them—I think it helped her to see that this was a partnership…and I think it made her feel better."

In this section, I described communication strategies. For example, I discussed establishing a communication strategy or schedule at the beginning of an evaluation and following up with ongoing communication. Ongoing communication was particularly critical for evaluators because, again, it aligned with the intent of being helpful and providing an evaluation that was relevant and useful to the client(s). Additionally, I discussed the importance of being willing to adapt communication strategies as a way of responding to the needs of the client(s) and in service of moving the evaluation forward.

Thoughtful Framing and Sharing of Evaluation Information

There was a remarkable amount of similarity in the way that interviewed evaluators discussed the framing and sharing of evaluation information, especially when it came to presenting unfavorable or negative evaluation feedback to clients. I believe this finding is related to IC because it demonstrates the care that evaluators invest in their interactions and relationships with clients.

Interviewed evaluators acknowledged that, often times, clients have a sense of the things that are going well (and not so well) within their projects. It is especially helpful when an evaluator has been sharing information throughout the evaluation process as a way of helping clients stay informed—a form of ongoing communication. Unfavorable or negative feedback is "rarely a shocker," as it shouldn't be (Havana), because clients "generally already know the issues" and so "[evaluators] are sort of confirming what they already know." Presenting evaluation information needs to be thoughtful, strategic, and responsive to the surrounding project circumstances.

A first step in presenting and sharing evaluation information is facilitating a productive and useful conversation that helps a client move forward with her or his project. An example of

this process comes from Colin, who explained that: "Nobody wants an outsider coming in to lecture them about what they're doing wrong. And so the way that I like to try to handle that is to talk to them about the issues they're having and what can we do to help?" As a result, he was very intentional about facilitating a conversation that revolved around problem solving. Sylvia had the same end goal as Colin, but took a slightly different approach and talked about partnering with the client through the use of "we" language:

> When I sit down to give them the bad news, I make it a "we." We got something we got to talk about. We have some things we need to work on. So I don't make it a "you" conversation, I make it a "we" conversation. And by putting it that way, I think it softens it. So when they have bad findings, the first thing I do is sit down and steer them into problem-solving mode.

The second step in presenting and sharing information is framing or phrasing it in ways that can be heard, because "if you don't frame it properly, the client just "doesn't hear it" (Vanessa). Interviewed evaluators "sandwiched" evaluation information. "Sandwiching" information was an intentional process of presenting positive-negative-positive feedback. This was done as a way of softening the negative with the things that were going well in a project. This strategy was beneficial because it also fostered a sense of trust with the client because it demonstrated that the evaluator was there to help and not just to uncover and display the "warts" of a project (Greg). Interviewed evaluators took care in phrasing the negative or less positive information as opportunities for project improvement and growth. Two representative examples come from Dahlia and Hayden that demonstrate this process. Dahlia talked about "sandwiching" through an example from her evaluation work with a parenting program. She shared:

> The results showed that they had really good results with parents, like parents increased their empathy, increased their confidence, increased their efficacy as a parent but…children showed absolutely no change in their behavior…so I had to communicate that to the executive director and luckily the director and I have a really good relationship, so I was able to just be open about it and say, "You're having good results here, and the program is falling short in this area. And it may be because it might not be enough time for change; the children might not be used to their parents in their new ways.

> If the parents keep being consistent, the children might change eventually, but that could be one reason; the main thing is that we need to do further evaluation around the children's behavior...Part of the best practices of giving feedback is sandwiching it, so positive, negative, positive. So that's what I use, like I said, "These results are really promising; however, these other results in this area have fallen short from the goal that you had," and having a conversation around it, and talking about the positive again. So I'll always try to couch those things in positive results.

As this illustrates, Dahlia was strategic and thoughtful when it came to discussing evaluation feedback. In addition to "sandwiching" the information, she also engaged the client in further exploring possible reasons as to why no change was observed for the children. In asking her "where she drew from to facilitate that conversation?" she shared that it probably came from her previous professional training and experience as a counselor.

Another example of this process of "sandwiching" comes from Hayden, who through the evaluation process, uncovered miscommunication between the project leadership and staff:

> I think the leadership of the project thought they were doing a great job, everybody was really well informed, and that the people who were implementing on the ground were really happy with how things were going. And what we found is that the people on the ground were not very happy. And they didn't really trust the leadership of their project. And I don't think the project leadership was aware of that. And so I had to go and present to leadership about my findings, and so I was careful in how I worded it, and I said, "Look, what you guys are trying to do is really institute some cultural change at your institution, and that's slow, and it's messy. And I think it presents some opportunities for you to help people make those changes. And one of the things that I found is that you could stand to strengthen your approach to communication and that not everyone is feeling really bought into what you're trying to do"…I think the way to present unpleasant or difficult things are to say them in a way that it's about opportunity, and it's about, "I know that you all are committed to making these changes, and I'm happy to say that I have found some opportunities for you to improve what you're doing, so that you can more quickly and effectively reach your goals."...and I did present some things that are going well …some people call it the compliment sandwich, where you say, "Good job. Okay, this isn't going so well. Okay, good job." And so it's about making sure that people feel like you're, again, on their side. That you're wanting them to be successful, and part of wanting them to be successful is helping them understand these opportunities that you've identified.

This is another prime example of the steps evaluators took to discuss negative evaluation feedback. Like Hayden, interviewed evaluators were intentional about not only encouraging a

productive conversation around negative feedback as opportunities for growth, but also about demonstrating through this process that as evaluators, they were there not to judge but to help and support clients so they meet their intended goals. Additionally, it is a process that helps build and foster a sense of trust in what evaluators have to offer beyond accountability purposes.

Another aspect of this finding is the importance of situating the information presented and helping the clients see the information within the broader context. For example, Dahlia talked about this through her work with the parenting program where she helped situate the findings to better understand the results. As another example, Cara directly talked about helping clients understand the "proportionality" of negative findings: "So if you're reporting numbers, you want to be cautious to say, out of the people who said that, remember while this is a negative finding, only 30% said this but regardless you still have to address this situation." By doing this, it helped clients better understand the "weight" that certain findings carried in the broader picture. Havana also talked about not being afraid to challenge clients' "set of beliefs" about what they're trying to accomplish. She shared:

> Then when things aren't as good as people had hoped, our job really is to help put that into context. And that context may be, "Your goals were way too broad; there's no way you could have ever achieved this given what we know about how change happens. It could be grounded in the research, "The research shows that x, y, and z; therefore your findings are no different than other findings, or your initiative did not achieve because of these three factors that inhibited its progress."…context may be around data, or literature or just challenging their set of beliefs about what they were trying to accomplish.

Additionally, it is important to consider the platform of where information, especially unfavorable information, should be discussed, presented, and shared. For instance, Hayden stressed the importance of "choosing your audience carefully" and being attentive to what is appropriate (or not) to share in a written report: "I think there are certainly times to be clear in a written report, and I think that there are other times where that would actually undermine the success of the project, and it makes more sense to go one-on-one." Greg touched on a similar

point based on his evaluation work within the government context when at times, he might get push-back about what can and cannot be included in written reports. For instance, he explained that:

> It's also the case that they know their context, and they know certain kinds of sentences, paragraphs, or whatever would have an impact in their world. And so, sometimes, they'll give you feedback and you'll say okay that's reasonable but other times, they will push you not to say things that are negative. You got to decide how important it is to stay on good terms with that and sometimes you say, I'll work with you on this but we have to say something about this.

This demonstrates that, while evaluators have to be truthful, evaluators also have to be responsive to the client's needs within *their* environment. One way that Greg learned to handle this situation was to always, from the beginning, negotiate the sharing of information in the evaluation contract, especially when it comes to working in highly politicized environments. He shared that:

> If you don't put it into the contract that you're allowed to publish these things, you don't have any choice. I heard this story when I first started, one of my colleagues saying that he gave a report to a federal agency, and the conclusion was, "You shouldn't do this." And they simply said, "Thank you," and they took the word shouldn't out and added should. So it's important to have that specified ahead of time so that if anything negative comes out, they don't say that you can't publish it.

In sum, interviewed evaluators were thoughtful about the ways in which evaluation information should be shared and framed, especially when it came to unfavorable or negative project feedback. One strategy that was discussed was the use of the "sandwich" technique, where the information was framed into a positive-negative-positive process as a way of fostering a productive conversation and not focusing so much on what is not working well. The aim is to problem solve and help clients improve their project. Moreover, evaluators talked about carefully situating negative feedback within the broader context and, again, helping the client navigate through ways in which to understand and problem solve.

A summary of the findings presented in this chapter are illustrated in the following table.

Table 5

Summary of Findings: Understanding Situational Awareness (SA) and Interpersonal Competence (IC)

Underlying Evaluator Factors that Play a Role in SA and IC	
1. Evaluator's dispositions	• Open to learning and willing to listen • Flexible and adaptable • Displaying a "consultant" mindset
2. Evaluator's reputation and experiential knowledge	• Built over time in a content/subject area • Enhances knowledge about projects in particular areas/situations • Helps with establishing a baseline of trust and credibility
SA Competency Factors	
1. Intentional project learning and understanding	• Strong focus at the start and use different strategies • Gather project-relevant information and ask questions • Use qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups, observations, etc.) • Conduct onsite visits with the purpose of learning • Strategically demonstrate knowledge gained (helps build trust)
2. Self-awareness and cultural consciousness	• Self-awareness as a person and as an evaluator • Humble approach builds on the dispositions of open to learning, willing to listen, and demonstrating a "consultant" mindset ○ Learned and sharpened through practical experience • Cultural consciousness particularly of environments and/or communities culturally different from one's own
3. Understand perspectives and expectations relevant to evaluation	• Explore and understand clients' perspectives about and expectations of evaluation (helps build trust) • Understand organizational climate around the practice of evaluation • Establish trust at the start; helps move the evaluation forward in the service of meeting the needs of the client

Table 5 (cont.)

IC Competency Factors	
4. Purposeful, ongoing and responsive communication	• Plan and establish a communication strategy/schedule at the start • Engage in ongoing communication throughout the evaluation (helps build trust) • Assess for appropriate forms of communication based on the surrounding situation; adapt and be responsive to needs and project changes
5. Thoughtful framing and sharing of evaluation information	• Facilitate productive and useful conversations for moving the evaluation and project forward; focus on problem solving • Frame information as opportunities and in ways that can be heard by clients, especially unfavorable or negative feedback/findings (e.g., use the "sandwich" technique of positive-negative-positive) (helps build trust) • Situate information within a broader context

Note. Competency factors are numbered 1 through 5 across SA and IC competency factors because in practice these are somewhat intertwined.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The current movement for identifying evaluator competencies is in part driven by the evaluation community's interest in professionalizing the field. Such professionalization may well entail using competencies to assess whether someone is qualified or competent to practice evaluation. Examples of this move towards professionalization are the Credentialed Evaluator (CE) designation launched in 2010 by the Canadian Evaluation Society and the recent European Evaluation Society's Voluntary Evaluator Peer Review (VERP) initiative. However, what complicates the identification of evaluator competencies is the complexity and diversity of the field. Evaluation is not only a method-driven practice, but a "human enterprise" that often operates in complex, socio-political contexts (Abma & Widdershoven, 2008; King & Stevahn, 2013, p. xvii).

The purpose of this study was to contribute to our understanding of interpersonal competence (IC) and situational awareness (SA) from the perspective of practicing experienced program evaluators. The results I presented in the previous chapter illustrate that it is not only important to understand the meaning of these two dimensions as competencies, but it is also useful to explore and attend to what contributes to the enactment of these competencies in practice. In this chapter, I discuss four key findings of this study. Next, I discuss implications for evaluation education and training. I close this chapter with future directions for research.

Summary of Findings

First, this study helped identify an underlying dimension of evaluator dispositions that informed IC and SA. This finding was important because it provides insight into specific dispositions that play a role in understanding what it means to be "a good contributor to

evaluation" (Rowe, 2014, p. 123). More specifically, interviewed evaluators drew on the dispositions of being open to learning and willing to listen, flexibility, and demonstrating a "consultant" mindset. As defined in Chapter Four, the term disposition refers to an individual's tendency to behave or respond in a certain way to situations faced. The dispositions identified in this study showed up in the ways that evaluators went about learning about a project, exemplifying cultural consciousness, understanding stakeholders' expectations of evaluation, communicating throughout the evaluation, and framing and sharing evaluative information. For instance, working in and with a culturally different environment, being open to learning and willing to listen guided evaluators' commitment and motivation to broaden their scope of understanding beyond the context of the project and into learning more about the surrounding contextual circumstances. This was not something evaluators were asked to do by the client, but it was something evaluators, such as Dahlia and Cara, knew they had to do in order to provide a relevant and useful evaluation. Examples of this include Cara's visit to historical sites to better understand the environment in which the project was situated and Dahlia's tracking of political and social news that was relevant to the community of an evaluated project. Hayden is another example of an evaluator who was "disposed to be" flexible (Shum & Crick, 2012). This was exemplified through her account of an evaluation where she initially communicated with an adversarial and defensive client and she made the decision to change the means of communication based on her assessment of the situation. This was something she was not asked to do, but took it upon herself to make that change in order to move the evaluation forward. Overall, understanding IC and SA also meant understanding and uncovering evaluators' dispositions relevant to their evaluation practice.

This finding highlights the importance of attending to the underlying attributes that an individual brings to a job, which is one of the views discussed in Chapter Two relevant to understanding competence. As a review, this conceptualization of competence emphasizes that within highly complex occupations, it is beneficial to focus on answering the question of what contributes to effective performance over what needs to be done, because what needs to be done can include multiple ways that over time change. Additionally, in reviewing how IC and SA are conceptualized within evaluator competency frameworks, the role of evaluator dispositions in relation to navigating IC and SA is not directly addressed. Thus, this study's finding on evaluator dispositions begins to shed insight into what we should also be attending to in discussing evaluator competence.

Second, the IC and SA competency factors are all grounded in evaluator's intention and commitment to the practice of evaluation. Much of what interviewed evaluators did in practice were aspects that are often not formally captured, such as within an evaluation report. Additionally, these are also aspects not often requested from clients or stakeholders. This includes examples such as visiting historical sites to build knowledge about the community, gaining an understanding of the surrounding political factors, continuous reflection about who one is as a person and how that may influence an evaluation, or assessing what are the best means of communication within an evaluation. As such, this finding touches on the importance of also understanding professional commitment. Lee and colleagues (2000) explained that professional commitment can be understood as the "psychological link between a person and his or her occupation that is based on an affective reaction to that occupation" (p. 800). In other words, it refers to an emotional connection an individual has towards his or her profession that can influence occupational behaviors, retention, and success. Further exploring the professional

commitment of evaluators can help provide insight into the kinds of attitudes evaluators hold towards their practice, which can inform the conversation on evaluator competence. Professional commitment can be a key factor or an additional venue to better understand what it means to be a competent evaluator. This finding is particularly relevant as conversations continue around the value of evaluator competencies and of professionalizing the field.

Third, establishing trust was salient across the dimensions of IC and SA. Interviewed evaluators were aware of the possible negative attitudes or reactions they could face when starting an evaluation. This was particularly relevant when those involved in or affected by an evaluation had a previous negative experience with research or evaluation, such as in the case shared by Gloria. This kind of finding is not new to the field of evaluation, as different scholars have discussed how the practice of evaluation can elicit reactions of mistrust or resistance (Abma, 2006; Taut & Brauns, 2003). However, the results from this study help to practically situate trust within the competency factors of IC and SA. For example, the importance of establishing trust was present in the demonstration of knowledge gained when learning about a project, in understanding clients' past experiences with and expectations of evaluation, in engaging in ongoing communication with a project, and in being mindful of how evaluation information/feedback is presented and shared. I further realized that the relational dimension of evaluation practice is not so much about establishing professional relationships but about establishing and fostering trust within and for the evaluation process.

Fourth, the results from this study helped situate SA and IC within the evaluation process. The results illustrated that situational competence is vital at the start of an evaluation because it is during that time that an evaluator is learning and situating the evaluation within the broader context of a project. Additionally, it is during this time when establishing a sense of trust is

crucial for the purposes of use and relevance of an evaluation. As such, interpersonal competence is key at the start as well as throughout the evaluation process. This differs from how these two dimensions are situated within evaluator competency frameworks. For example, in some of the frameworks, IC and SA are positioned as part of professional practice, and at times, these competencies are broadly written. It is difficult to see where these competencies are most relevant in relation to the life of an evaluation study. This finding addresses one of the suggestions made by focus group participants in Galport and Azzam (2016) in that a visual representation would be helpful in explaining which competencies "are necessary at various points in the evaluation" (p. 16). The results from this study provide a starting point for exploring a visual representation of competencies as it relates to the process of an evaluation.

Implications for Evaluation Education and Training

One of the purposes for developing competencies within a profession is to help clarify what skills, dispositions, attitudes, and knowledge contributes to competent job performance. This is not only helpful for job recruitment and assessment, but also key for guiding the education and training of professionals situated in a specific field. Thus, the availability of evaluator competency frameworks provides an initial path for understanding what skills and knowledge to focus on as an educator and trainer of program evaluation. While there are various frameworks available for use, it is important to remember that these frameworks share overarching commonalities in what are key domains of evaluator competence. Included in these fundamental domains of evaluation practice are interpersonal competence and situational awareness, the focus of this study. Researchers have found that these two competency dimensions of practice, especially that of interpersonal skills, are often not sufficiently addressed within evaluation education and training (Dewey, et al., 2008; Stevahn et al., 2005). For

example, Dewey and colleagues (2008) found that evaluation job seekers rated interpersonal skills at the bottom of the list of skills taught in their graduate career. In comparison, interpersonal skills was one area of high importance to employers of evaluators and also an area that new recruits often lacked in. What complicates attention to these two dimensions within education is that these areas of practice are often context dependent and can be challenging to address in traditional lecture-style courses or training sessions. Furthermore, as the results from this study illustrate, the competency factors of IC and SA are highly informed by evaluators' dispositions, professional commitment, and mindful attention to building and fostering professional trust—all complex dimensions of practice. So, how do we incorporate and address this within the education and training of evaluators?

One strategy is to incorporate case-based learning in the teaching of program evaluation that specifically focuses IC and SA. Case-based learning is meant to challenge students in their thinking and learning by requiring them to interactively respond to real-life scenarios (Graham, 2014). Cases are often presented in story format that expose students to the complexity and diversity that comes with working in a certain profession. The aim is to help students "understand a situation, identify the range of issues involved in the case, make decisions, develop solutions, and formulate principles for dealing with future situations" (p. 196). As such, the results of this study could be useful in developing case scenarios that help demonstrate the nuancees of IC and SA. For example, in addressing the importance of trust, different scenarios could be developed from the results presented on the importance of understanding stakeholders' previous evaluation experiences or of appropriately demonstrating the knowledge gained about a project. Additionally, the reasons as to why this is important to the evaluation process could be discussed based on the practical situation presented. Another scenario could revolve around

learning about a project and what this means for evaluators in different roles (i.e., internal versus external). This kind of conversation could help students understand that while SA is important in every evaluation context, it should be negotiated based on the situation in which an evaluation is embedded. Case-based learning could be further supplemented with role-play and simulations to further engage and motivate students. For instance, students can interactively explore different ways of responding to a situation presented in a scenario and the consequences of that response.

Another approach is to utilize fieldwork experiences, such as internships, to emphasize the complexity and importance of IC and SA for and in evaluation practice. The importance and value of fieldwork is well documented within the evaluation literature (Dillman, 2012; Trevisan, 2004). However, practical experiences are often not offered or required in combination with courses (Dillman, 2012). Similar to case-based learning, fieldwork exposes students "to the intricacies of conducting evaluation in real-world settings" (Trevisan, 2004, p.256). However, in addition to learning through the experiences of others (through case studies), students can learn through their own practical evaluation experiences. As such, fieldwork can help students better understand and appreciate the challenges and complexities of practice. One thought is to explore the development of partnerships with evaluation firms and organizations that can provide fieldwork experience.

A key strategy in fostering learning about IC and SA is to also incorporate self-reflection in the teaching of evaluation. The frameworks, in addition to the results of this study as outlined in Table 5 in Chapter Four, provide a working template that can be used for self-assessment about these dynamics of practice. In particular, this self-reflection can help bring to light strengths and weaknesses relevant to IC and SA that may not be explicitly talked about within

the literature or courses. This self-reflection could also be used when involved in fieldwork, placing the responsibility of learning on the students.

Future Research

This study raises important questions and recommendations for future research. First, interviewed evaluators were primarily U.S. practitioners with different professional and educational backgrounds. Future research in this area could benefit from focusing on interviewing evaluators who practice evaluation more internationally. It would also be interesting to interview evaluators who were emerging evaluators. This information would be helpful in further understanding what, aside from a reputation and experience, contributes to IC and SA. Additionally, future studies could also focus on evaluators who practice in one specific area/context/discipline (i.e., health, government, independent consulting, k–12, etc.) These kinds of studies can be useful for articulating additional nuances of competences for a specific context. Second, it would be worthwhile to explore what it means to be a competent evaluator versus a competent evaluation team and how is this being accounted for within the developed competency frameworks? This is a similar argument made by Galport and Azzam (2016). As evaluation studies are often carried out by an evaluation team, it would be useful to understand the importance and relevance of certain evaluator competencies for different evaluation team members. In other words, what can we learn about evaluator competencies in the context of an evaluation team? Third, interviewed evaluators spoke briefly about facilitation and negotiation skills. Future research can focus more in-depth on the use of these skills to better understand what this means and how much can be realistically expected from an evaluator or evaluation team. Fourth, it would be fascinating to conduct training studies to determine the extent to which evaluators can learn competency aspects of SA and IC. For this study, it would be beneficial to

also explore how other professions, such as that of teaching or social work, teach and assess competencies of IC and SA.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

02/04/2015

Jennifer Greene
College of Education
230C Education Bldg
1310 S Sixth St
M/C 708

RE: *A Qualitative Study of Experienced Program Evaluators' Competencies*
IRB Protocol Number: 15553

EXPIRATION DATE: February 03, 2018

Dear Dr. Greene:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled *A Qualitative Study of Experienced Program Evaluators' Competencies*. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 15553 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(2).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at the OPRS office, or visit our website at http://www.irb.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Rose St Clair

Rose St. Clair, BA
Assistant Human Subjects Research Specialist, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

c: Gabriela Garcia

telephone (217) 333-2670 • *fax* (217) 333-0405 • *email* IRB@illinois.edu

APPENDIX B: ORAL CONSENT INFORMATION

Understanding and Defining Interpersonal Competence and Situational Responsiveness as Essential Evaluator Competencies

You are invited to participate in a qualitative interview study on the practice of experienced program evaluators. The purpose of this study is primarily exploratory in that it attempts to develop a more thorough and detailed understanding of the competencies that are grouped under the domains of interpersonal competence (i.e., how evaluators communicate, build and maintain professional relationships) and situational responsiveness (i.e., how evaluators assess the situation/context in which the evaluation is embedded in).

This study will include an individual interviews (either by Skype or phone) that will be audio recorded. The audio files will then be transcribed and erased afterwards. All information will remain confidential and I will report data in aggregate format only and in ways that individuals cannot be identified. Data will be stored electronically on a password protected site and only I, the researcher, will have access to the site.

There are no known risks in this study beyond that of allotting time to participate in an individual interview. The potential benefit of this study is to gather systematic information that reflects the practice of experienced program evaluators.

Although I would like to hear from you, your participation is voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Jennifer Greene at jcgreene@illinois.edu or Gabriela Garcia at gjuare3@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Before we begin the interview, I will ask you to verbally indicate your consent to participate by stating the following:

I consent to participate in this study and agree to the audio recording of the interview.

Thank you,

Gabriela Garcia, Doctoral Candidate
Jennifer Greene, Professor

Educational Psychology
College of Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before we begin, I want to remind you of 2 things outlined in the consent form I sent to you: First, the interview is voluntary and you can skip any questions you don't wish to answer. Second, I'd like to audio-record the interview because this helps to make sure I accurately record what you say. After it is transcribed, it will be deleted. Any kind identifiable information that you mention (name of projects, locations, names of project managers, and so on) will be removed in the final reporting of this data. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Okay, I will start the recording now and if you could please verbally indicate your consent to participate on the audio recorder by stating:

I consent to participate in this study and agree to the audio recording of the interview.

As mentioned in my email, the purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of the broad set of skills that are used in evaluation practice with a specific attention to how an evaluator communicates, builds and maintains professional relationships and responds and becomes aware of the situation and context that surrounds an evaluation. With that in mind, I'm going to ask you to recall and talk about specific events based on your practice and ask you to share what exactly happened within those events.

But before we move into that part of the interview, I'd like to begin with some background questions that will help me better understand you as an evaluator.

Background

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how many years you've been practicing evaluation and generally, the type of evaluations that you've recently been conducting (such as large scale, domestic)?

2. Generally, how would you say you approach your evaluation work? Do you have a certain framework that you follow? What would you say informs your practice?

Interpersonal Skills – Ability to Build and Maintain Professional Evaluation Relationships

3. Tell me about an evaluation where you felt a successful trusting relationship was established with either a client, program participants or other relevant stakeholders? I imagine you may have plenty of examples you can draw from but if you can pick one to tell me about.
    a. If you would walk me through that relationship and talk about what you specifically did to build/foster that relationship?
    b. How did you know to do that? What informed that decision?
    c. In what ways do you think the relationship you just shared contributed to the usefulness and value of the evaluation?

4. Can you tell me about an evaluation where developing a trusting relationship was more of a struggle/challenge? And again, this can pertain to a client, program participants or other relevant stakeholders.
    a. What did you specifically try to do to build a more trusting relationship?
    b. How did you know to do that? What informed those decisions?
    c. How did you know to do [action] and not something else?

Interpersonal Skills – Communication

5. Can you talk about the process of communicating evaluation information/findings? Can you walk me through an evaluation example from your practice that demonstrates your process for that?

6. Tell me about an evaluation were able to effectively communicate difficult/unpleasant information within an evaluation you conducted?
    a. What skills did you use to navigate this communication?
    b. Where did you acquire these skills?

Situational Awareness & Responsiveness

7. Taking an evaluation you previously talked about in this interview, can you elaborate on first, how you went about learning about the program?
    a. Second, how did you go about learning about the surrounding contextual environment (i.e., social, historical, political, cultural, institutional, etc.)?
    b. What steps did you go through to ensure you were gathering a comprehensive understanding?

8. Talk about an evaluation where you had to adapt to a culturally different environment and talk about the steps you took to learn in that and about that environment?

9. In your opinion and reflecting on your practice, what would you say are the key ingredients in demonstrating cultural responsiveness? And if you could talk about this through an example (examples) of how you made these "ingredients" work for you in your practice.

10. Additional comments?

APPENDIX D: EVALUATOR COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
1. Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (ECPE)	Group of researchers in the United States	2005	• Competencies, which include knowledge, skills & dispositions, "describe various activities that evaluators carry out to achieve standards that constitute sound evaluation" • Wrote competencies in behavioral language	• Guide evaluation training programs • Enhance reflective practice • Contribute to professionalization of the field	**6 domains & 61 competencies** 1. Professional Practice (6) 2. Systematic Inquiry (20) 3. Situational Analysis (12) 4. Project Management (12) 5. Reflective Practice (5) 6. Interpersonal Competence (6)
2. Evaluator Competencies and Performance Statements	International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction® (ibstpi®)	2006	"The skills, knowledge, and attitudes that a competent evaluator must demonstrate to complete an evaluation assignment successfully within an organization."	Help inform internal staff and external consultants conducting evaluations in organizational settings, such as for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, military, and government agencies evaluating their own internal programs.	**14 competencies clustered in 4 domains & supported by 84 performance statements** 1. Professional Foundations 2. Planning and Designing the Evaluation 3. Implementing the Evaluation Plan 4. Managing the Evaluation
3. Recommendations on Education and Training in Evaluation: Requirement Profiles for Evaluators*	German Evaluation Society (DeGEval)	2008	• Not explicitly defined • *Explicitly connects to DeGEval standards*	Contribute to development of quality standards in education and training of evaluators	**5 categories with designated 20 domains** 1. Theory and history of evaluation (4 domains) 2. Methodological competencies (5 domains) 3. Organizational and subject knowledge (3 domains) 4. Social and personal competencies (5 domains)

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
					5. Evaluation practice (3 domains)
4. Core Competencies for Evaluators of the UN System	United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)	2008	"Clusters of related knowledge, skills, abilities, and other requirements necessary for successful job performance."		**5 categories of competencies** 1. Knowledge of the context of the United Nations 2. Technical and professional skills 3. Inter-personal skills 4. Personal attributes 5. Management skills
5. Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice	Canadian Evaluation Society (CES)	2010	"The background, knowledge, skills, and dispositions program evaluators need to achieve standards that constitute sound evaluations."	• Guide evaluation training programs • Inform writing evaluation job descriptions • Enhance reflective practice • Inform development of RFPs, SoWs, or ToRs • Support Credentialing Program	**5 domains & 61 competencies** 1) Reflective Practice (7) 2) Technical Practice (16) 3) Situational Practice (9) 4) Management Practice (7) 5) Interpersonal Practice (10) • *Provide DESCRIPTORS for what is meant by and included in each of the outlined competencies.* • *Utilized work by Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005*
6. Evaluator Competencies (2011)*	Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA)	2011	Competencies are "the range of skills, knowledge, experience, abilities, attributes and dispositions needed to successfully practice evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand."	• Promote and facilitate the development of quality evaluation practice in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), underpinned by the principles of the *Treaty of Waitangi.* • Provide evaluators with a self-review tool and professional development guide	**4 domains comprised of sub-competencies** 1) Contextual analysis and engagement (4) 2) Reflective practice and professional development (3) 3) Systematic evaluative inquiry (5) 4) Evaluation project management and professional practice (3) • *Inter-relationship between domains*

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
				• Support the development of employment criteria for evaluator roles • Provide guidance to evaluation trainers, teachers and tertiary institutions • Provide commissioners of evaluation with a 'tool' for assessing evaluators or evaluation teams • Provide broad guidance about evaluation standards • Enhance the professional accountability of evaluators and commissioners • Increase public awareness about what makes 'good' evaluation practice in Aotearoa NZ	

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
7. The EES Evaluation Capabilities Framework	European Evaluation Society (EES)	2011	• "Knowledge, practice and dispositions were confirmed as the three main clusters of evaluation capabilities." • Practice is central to evaluation competencies. • Did not address directly why used term capabilities	Promote a culture of professionalism to enhance good, quality evaluation practice	**3 domains & 30 capabilities** 1) Evaluation knowledge (15) 1.1 Appreciates the distinctive role played by evaluation in society (5) 1.2 Masters the antecedents of evaluation quality (5) 1.3 Understands the potential and limits of evaluation instruments and tools (5) 2) Professional Practice 2.1 Demonstrates capacity to manage and deliver evaluations (5) 2.2 Displays interpersonal skills (5) 3) Dispositions and attitudes (5)
8. Competencies for Development Evaluation Evaluators, Managers, and Commissioners	International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS)	2012	"Competence" is the demonstrated background, knowledge, and skills necessary to practice development evaluation or to appraise its practice by others.	• Enable development evaluation professionals to self-assess their relative strengths and weaknesses against accepted standards in order to improve their evaluation practice; • Facilitate the review of the capabilities of an individual or team to conduct a given development evaluation;	**3 professional categories (Evaluator, Manager of Evaluations, and Commissioner of Evaluations) that have separate lists of competencies that are organized by dimensions**

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
				• Encourage the setting up of individual capacity building plans; • Promote an increase in available training in the competency areas.	
9. UKES Evaluation Capabilities Framework	UK Evaluation Society (UKES)	2012	"The terminology of capabilities is used…to parallel the EES adoption of the term and to signal a broader interpretation and possible use."	• Promote quality evaluation practice • Promote a culture of professionalism to enhance good practice in evaluation	**3 domains & 35 capabilities** 1.1 Evaluation knowledge (5) 1.2 Familiarity with evaluation designs and approaches (5) 1.3 Comprehends and makes effective use of evaluation methodologies (5) 2.1 Professional Practice (8) 2.2 Demonstrates interpersonal skills (6) 3.1 Qualities, Attitudes or dispositions (6) • *Adoption of the term capabilities to signal a broader interpretation and possible use.*
10. Evaluation Competency Framework (ECF)	Republic of South Africa Department of Performance/ Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation	2012	Describes the knowledge, skills and abilities for Programme Managers, M&E Advisors and Evaluators that are involved in the evaluation of government programmes and policies.	Not explicitly stated	**4 dimensions containing broad domains comprised of specific competencies applied to three different roles (Program manager, M&E advisor, Evaluator)** 1. Overarching considerations 1.1 Contextual knowledge and understanding (9) 1.2 Ethical Conduct (2)

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
					1.3 Interpersonal skills (4) 2. Leadership (10) 3. Evaluation craft 3.1 Evaluative Discipline and Practice (7) 3.2 Research Practice (4) 4. Implementation of evaluations 4.1 Evaluation Planning (7) 4.2 Managing Evaluation (5) 4.3 Report writing & communication (4)
11. Evaluation Department Technical Competency Framework	Department for International Development (DFID)	2013	"Personal attributes or underlining characteristics, which combined with technical or professional skills, enable the delivery of a role/job or posting."	• Basis to create a pool of accredited evaluation specialists drawn from generalists and other specialists across DFID. • Used to assess suitability of recruited candidates • Used in performance management	**5 domains organized into levels (Foundation, Competent, Skilled, Expert) & performance indicators for each level** 1. Best Practice in Evaluation Approaches and Methods 2. Gathering and Using Evidence for Evaluation 3. Communicating and Sharing Evaluation Findings, Knowledge & Expertise 4. Upholds Evaluation Independence, Quality & Standards 5. Leading, Managing and Delivering Evaluations *They are set at a level that someone who has been carrying out the post, role or function for 6 – 12 months should be able to demonstrate that they are meeting.*

Competency Statements/ Framework	Developed by:	Year	Competency/Competencies Concept Defined	Framework Purpose	Domains & Competencies
12. Evaluators' Professional Learning Competency Framework*	Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) INC.	2013	• Not explicitly defined • "A competent evaluator brings together a variety of knowledge and skills within an overarching frame of an evaluative attitude and professional practice, for conducting evaluation activities."	• Guide and support members and other interested parties to enhance their evaluation knowledge and expertise • Guide professional learning activities, programs and conferences	**7 domains comprised of sub-competencies** 1. Evaluative Attitude and Professional Practice 2. Evaluation Theory 3. Culture, Stakeholders and Context 4. Research Methods and Systematic Inquiry 5. Project Management 6. Interpersonal Skills 7. Evaluation Activities • *Inter-relationship between domains* • *Drew on ANZEA, EES, CES, & IDEAS*

APPENDIX E: CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET

PSEUDONYM NAME:
DATE AND TIME:
EVENT AND PURPOSE:

1. Who is the interviewee?

2. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

3. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

4. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

5. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact?

Overall Summary of Interview
[This refers to providing a brief overview of how the interview went. Also, briefly describe the context in which the interview was conducted and any additional information (i.e., voice tone) in addition to oral interview.]

Methodological Comments
[This refers to the quality of data such as how open was the interviewee to the questions and how much probing was needed.]

APPENDIX F: INITIAL CODING PROCESS

Interpersonal Competence [IC] and Situational Responsiveness [SR] Codebook

- **Interpersonal competence [IC] refers to the ways in which an evaluator communicates and relates to others in the evaluation context.**
- **Situational Competence [SC] refers to the ways in which an evaluator learns about and is attentive and responsive to the surrounding situation and context in which the evaluation is embedded in.**

Code	Sub-Code	Definition	Example
Attitudes [A]	**These attitudes underlie interpersonal competence [IC] and situational responsiveness [SR].**		
	Adaptable and flexible attitude [A_AF]	An evaluator demonstrates that they are adaptable and flexible to the surrounding context and situation of an evaluation. Demonstrating such an attitude shows that an evaluator can skillfully and strategically adapt the evaluation to meet the needs of a changing project, thus fostering a sense of trust in the evaluation process.	• "roll with the punches"—Colin
	Non-authoritative attitude [A_NA]	An evaluator has a "consultant" mindset and walks into an evaluation with no one agenda or set way of conducting an evaluation. An evaluator is there to help/assist the project. An evaluator is cognizant about displaying evaluative-related knowledge in a manner that will be helpful and useful to projects. As such, an evaluator is open to learning about the project, especially at the beginning of an evaluation, with the goal of helping/assisting and being relevant/useful to the project. This also includes not being afraid to push back and strategically challenge ways of thinking in an effort of supporting a project.	• "not force what [an evaluator] values"—Olivia • "…they know I'm an expert. I mean they call me and like you know, help me do…they know I'm an expert. I don't have to act like it"—Sylvia
	Humble attitude [A_H]	An evaluator is aware of the power of evaluation as a systematic tool. An evaluator is aware of who they are (self-reflection and awareness). *Most relevant and enhanced when working with culturally different environments*	

Code	Sub-Code	Definition	Example
Evaluation as collaborative service [ECS] ***Commitment/ disposition***	**Program evaluation is a service that is conducted collaboratively and in partnership with the project (primarily with the client(s)). By viewing evaluation as a collaborative service, it fosters a learning orientation and promotes evaluation ownership and use on part of the project. This is also intentionally demonstrated by specific steps and actions.**		
	Responsive and Engaging [ECS_RE]	An evaluator actively and constructively helps a project from beginning to end of the evaluation process. Examples of helping include: -providing feedback in "real time"; -being responsive to the needs of the project An evaluator fosters client engagement and learning throughout the evaluation.	"So we're trying to sort of bake some of those key elements into the evaluation, so we have something at the back end that lines up with how they're hoping to use it."—Colin
	Help focus [ECS_HF]	An evaluator helps a project focus and narrow the scope of goals/interests for the requested evaluation.	• Colin • Olivia
	Attention to framing of evaluation information/feedback [ECS_FI]	An evaluator is attentive to how information is framed and presented, especially when it comes to unpleasant or "negative" evaluation information. For instance, an evaluator makes sure the information is presented in a way that fosters learning and growth for the project.	• Havana • Colin • Gloria • Cara • Hayden • Dahlia • Sylvia • Sam
	Co-Creation of information [CST_CI]	An evaluator collaborates with client(s) to further understand and interpret evaluation findings/results.	• Sam • Cara • Hayden

Code	Sub-Code	Definition	Example
Trust & Credibility [TC]	**IC is about establishing and sustaining a trusting and credible evaluation process.**		
	Aim for clarity and transparency with the evaluation process [TC_CT]	An evaluator is clear and transparent about the evaluation process with those involved in an effort of facilitating trust in and credibility with the evaluation process.	• Data plan—Colin
	Time awareness [TC_TA]	An evaluator is aware of the fact that establishing a sense of trust takes time and credibility. As such, an evaluator strategically factors in time and/or activities in the evaluation process in an effort of fostering a sense of trust and credibility. Depending on the project timeline and evaluation, these efforts can result in long-term relationships.	• Takes about 6 months—Colin
	Experience and Reputation [TC_ER]	An evaluator's experience and reputation contributes to an initial foundation of trust and credibility with the evaluation.	• Olivia • Robert • Sam • Sylvia
	Purposeful and ongoing communication [TC_POC]	Evaluators are purposeful about their communication with projects and continuously assess the best ways to appropriately communicate throughout the evaluation process. An evaluator engages in ongoing communication throughout the evaluation process by attending team meetings and being present (either via conference call, onsite, skype, and so on). It is also not only about being present but engaging.	• "so we go to all those meetings and we do a conference call also where we will provide a little burst of feedback..."—Colin • Hayden

Code	Sub-Code	Definition	Ideas for Potential Examples
Situational Awareness [SA]	**Three steps—learn, aware, respond accordingly**		
	Purposeful understanding of the client/project [SA_EUCP]	An evaluator makes a concentrated effort to get to know and understand the client and project: expectations, what are the needs, previous evaluation experience, etc. Minimum activity—an evaluator depends on the client to guide what should be relevant to the evaluation.	• Working group—Havana • Use of the logic model as an organizing tool—Colin
	Intentional learning and expansion of project understanding [SA_ILEU]	An evaluator engages in activities that expand their understanding about the project's surrounding environment/situation (i.e., reads articles, subscribes to local newspaper, attends project/initiative sessions). This is done in an effort to: 1) foster trust and credibility and 2) efficiently assist through the evaluation process. Minimum activity—an evaluator depends on the client to guide what should be relevant to the evaluation. *Enhanced when working with culturally different environments—"*Think outside the box" activities—visit museums, historical places, engage (when possible) in community conversations.	• Cara • Sam • Hayden
	Awareness of organizational dynamics [SA_ODA]	An evaluator is aware of the organizational dynamics that could influence the evaluation process. The ways in which an evaluator responds varies (conflict resolution?)	• Some don't get involved-Yolanda • Some engage in conflict resolution
	Budget considerations [SA_BC]	An evaluator takes into consideration what can be done within a set budget and adjust accordingly.	
	Willingness for self-reflection [SA_WSR]	An evaluator is willing to reflect on who they are and how personal assumptions/bias could influence an evaluation. *Most relevant when working with culturally different environments.*	